

Maintaining, Repairing, and Cleaning your Personal Flotation Devices

Written by Kris Galvin

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Repair

Most importantly, please do not try to repair your life jacket, life vest, or any personal flotation device. In the event of a potential drowning, the area of repair could be the weak spot that is the difference between life and death. Regularly inspect your life jackets for tears or damage. Assess and determine that all buckles, snaps, zippers, and straps are functioning properly. When you find a bad area, do not hesitate, throw the PFD away. Remember we want to **prevent** a drowning. Simply buying another jacket is the safest option you have.

Inflatable Life Jackets are to be maintained according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Inflatable PFD's are known to trigger and inflate by themselves. Be certain this mechanism is working properly for you. Keep in mind this is a life saving device. If it is not working right, you won't wear it. If you don't wear it, you cannot save a life. Dispose of or immediately return to manufacturer any and all devices not working properly.

Cleaning Mildew from Personal Flotation Device

Cleaning can be easy. If done when the mildew is *first* noticed it only takes a few minutes. To clean you will need a bucket, white vinegar, warm water, a horse hair brush, a toothbrush, and mild detergent. There are 5 easy steps on how to clean:

- 1) Fill a bucket with very warm water and 1 c. white vinegar. Dip a stiff horsehair brush and a toothbrush into the solution. Horse Hair is a durable hair that is soft to slightly stiff. It will not harm the material of your life jacket.
- 2) Spread your vest out. Determine where all the areas of mildew are. Scrub the vinegar solution directly on the areas of mold. Scrub vigorously. In the more difficult areas around straps, clips, seam lines, and zippers the toothbrush will do a good job.
- 3) After taking care of the problem spots, do a gentle scrub over the whole vest killing the mold spores that are still invisible.

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4. 4) Rinse the vest thoroughly and repeat the process until the mildew is gone.
5. 5) Finally, give the vest a good scrub with a fresh bucket of water and mild detergent. This will remove the dirt as well as the smell of vinegar. Rinse the vest well and hang in a sunny, dry location.

Also be certain your PFD still has the USCG mark of approval easily legible.

Prevention from Mildew Problems

Think prevention. Prevention will save you time and aggravation. The simplest action is to take all those soggy life jackets and hang them to dry in a warm area. Consider where your most convenient place to hang PFD's will be. Dry your jackets before you store them. These easy steps will keep mildew to a minimum, thus allowing you more time to play!

Storage

To extend the life of your personal flotation devices stow your *dry* PFD's in a dry storage locker. Open and air out locker periodically. Clean the locker regularly to prevent mildew from taking hold. Mildew loves dark, moist areas – so try your best to keep it dry.