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One Minute Tailgate Safety Topic

Personal Flotation Devices

In regards to using Work Vests or any other Life Jacket, the saying goes “It can only save your life if you’re wearing it.” Less obvious is what to expect upon entering the water once you take an unexpected fall. Depending on the height from which you fall, position of your body when entering the water, along with any currents present you may be kept under longer than you think. Type V Work Vests are required by United States Coast Guard to have a minimum buoyant force of 17 ½ pounds. This is adequate buoyancy to keep your head, neck and the top of your shoulders above the water. You will rise to the surface more quickly with more body fat and air pockets in your clothing. A lean and muscular person will rise more slowly to the surface.

A person of 200 lbs weighs 10 lbs in the water, 80% of a person’s weight is water which has no weight in the water, and about 15% is fat, which is lighter than water, consequently, the real weight of the person in water is about 10 pounds.

Having your Work Vest fit snugly is key to survival. Loose fitting or unbuckled Work Vests can slip over your head when falling feet first, allowing you to sink much further down. Hold on to your Work Vest as you enter the water just in case. Nothing is more important at that moment than getting your mouth above the top of the waves. Once in the water pull your Work Vest down to make sure all of the buoyancy is under the water. This will get your mouth and nose as high as possible. Most Work Vests have a strap that goes under your arms to keep your vest from riding up. If it is missing then replacement is recommended. Work Vests wear out over time and will lose some of their buoyancy. Here’s a quick way to check for the minimum buoyancy of 17 ½ pounds. Attach 20 pounds of steel weight to the Work Vest. Dumb bell weights work just fine. Twenty pounds of steel weight weighs approximately 17 ½ pounds in the water. If your Work Vest floats above or just below the surface, it still meets the minimum required buoyancy. If it sinks it should be replaced. The foam in your Work Vest will lose its buoyancy if it is compressed under weight or crammed in storage. It’s best to hang them or set them on a shelf when not in use.

Humans are land dwellers and need a little help in the water.