



Personal Floatation Devices and the Law

One of the most asked questions at USRowing is “Do you have the Coast Guard Requirements for PFDs in shells?” Below is the specific rule as it applies to rowing.

CCR 175.3

Racing shell, rowing scull, racing canoe and racing kayak means a manually propelled vessel that is recognized by national or international racing associations for use in competitive racing and one in which all occupants row, scull, or paddle, with the exception of a coxswain, if one is provided, and is not designed to carry and does not carry any equipment not solely for competitive racing.

177.15 (33 CFR Ch. I (7-1-00 edition))

(a) No person may use a recreational vessel unless at least one PFD of the following types is on board for each person: (1) Type I PFD; (2) Type II PFD; or (3) Type III PFD.

(b) No person may use a recreation vessel 16 feet or more in length unless one Type IV is on board in addition to the total number of PFDs required in paragraph (a) of this section.

175.19 (33 CFR Ch. I (7-1-00 edition))

(c) Racing shells, rowing sculls, racing canoes and racing kayaks are exempted from the requirements for carriage of any Type PFD required in 175.15.

Please note that the federal law (and its pre-emption of state and local laws) applies only to waters that the U.S. Coast Guard deems “navigable.” All other waters are left to state and local jurisdiction. So, if the Coast Guard doesn’t classify the water you row on as navigable, you are subject to state or local law which could mean carrying a PFD. To find out whether the water you row in is considered “navigable,” contact the Coast Guard district in charge of your area. Contact information can be located at http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/lnm/district_boundaries.htm.