

FIREHOUSE®

Weekly Drill

DRILL #61: PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES

Introduction

One day, you and a few of the other firefighters are sitting around the station talking about the latest edition of the *Firehouse*® iPad app when suddenly the tones activate the radio. The dispatcher broadcasts an alarm for a boat capsized in the river. Your company is first due at the incident. Are you ready?

Does your response district have any bodies of water located within it? If you answered yes to this question, do you carry Personal Flotation Devices (PFD) on your responding apparatus? A PFD is the most important piece of equipment when working an incident on, or near, the water's edge.

All personnel within 15 feet of the water's edge should be wearing a PFD. In addition to fire department personnel, there will undoubtedly be other emergency responders showing up (from law enforcement to the paramedics) and their safety is just as important. Therefore, a safety officer should be assigned to strictly enforce this policy.

Depending on ground conditions near the water's edge, a rescuer could easily slip into the water. If they are not wearing their PFD, this could have a devastating consequence on the operation as another rescue may have to be started. However, when properly suited with a PFD, the operation will not necessarily have to be stopped. Remember, even an expert swimmer can drown.

PFD Types

Personnel Flotation Devices are categorized by the United States Coast Guard into five general types. As is the case with any personal protective equipment, it must fit properly and all safety devices have to be secured (zippered, latched or buckled).

Type 1 PFD – This PFD comes in two sizes (child and adult) and is quite bulky. It was designed for rough sea conditions off shore. This style will provide the greatest flotation and will turn most unconscious victims to the face-up position should they fall into the water.

Type 2 PFD – This PFD is very similar to the Type 1, except the design features are more for near-shore in-



cidents and calm seas. In most incidents, this flotation device will upright a victim to the face-up position. This PFD comes in a variety of sizes.

Type III PFD – Type III PFDs are designed for such activities as water skiing and boating, where the individual will be wearing the PFD for long periods of time. This PFD doesn't have the length of flotation time as the Type I and Type II and will not turn the person wearing it to face upward should they become unconscious. Type III PFDs come in a variety of sizes and styles to please the end users.

Type IV PFD – These are very different from the previously mentioned PFDs because a Type IV PFD is designed to be thrown to, and then held on to by, the victim. Generally, these PFDs are such shapes as a doughnut ring, horseshoe, or a small ball on a piece of rope. Many departments have throw bags designed to deploy a flotation device on the end of a rope that is thrown in the general vicinity of a person in the water. This person would then swim to the device or grab hold of it as it drifts by them, holding on and eventually being pulled back to the shoreline.

Type V PFD – The Type V PFD is designed for performing a specific task and should only be used for that task. These devices include white-water vests, flotation jackets and deck suits PFDs. Most swift-water rescue teams use this type of flotation PFD for their work.

–Prepared by Russell Merrick