

# **Social Marketing and Boating Safety A Project to Increase Personal Floatation Device Use**



## **Final Interview Results**

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## Background

Florida, nicknamed the “Sunshine State” and referred to as the “fishing capital of the world,” affords residents and visitors 300 days of full sunshine each year, providing an ideal climate for recreational outdoor activities (FWC, 2007; "Weather", n.d.). With approximately 1,197 statute miles of coastline and 11,000 miles of rivers, streams and waterways boating in Florida is a common outdoor activity experienced by many residents and visitors ("Florida Quick Facts", 2009). In 2007, Florida recorded 1,027,023 registered boaters ("Florida Vessel Owners," 2007). Not accounted for in this total are non-motorized vessels less than 16 feet and non-motorized canoes, kayaks, and other types of paddle craft, which further add to recreational waterway usage (FWC, 2007). Personal water craft (PWC) accounted for 17% of Florida recreational boaters. Miami-Dade, Pinellas, and Lee comprise the top three Florida counties, for the highest number of registered boaters. Lee County recorded 49,095 registered recreational boaters. (FWC, 2007).

Not only does boating provide for outdoor recreation in Florida, but it is a significant revenue generator for the state’s economy. During 2006, recreational boating generated \$39.5 billion in sales and service nationally, representing a 6% increase from 2005. Florida tops the charts in total expenditures for new powerboats, motors, trailers and boating accessories (*2006 Recreational boating statistical abstract*, 2007). Paddle sports are among the fastest growing segment of consumer goods in Florida (*2006 Recreational boating statistical abstract*, 2007). In fact Florida’s sales and service of water vessels supersedes the revenue generated from citrus fruits, ornamental plants, non citrus fruits, and vegetables. Regulatory and management agencies that encompass oversight of waterway use and boater safety are increasingly burdened by the growing number of recreational boaters. Management of waterways and waterway safety in

Florida is a collaborative effort between the U.S. Coast Guard and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The 13.2% population growth rate in Florida from 2000-2006 may be an indication of the potential for even greater waterway usage, increase in boating safety issues, and greater demands on water management organizations. ("State and County quick facts, 2009").

In the past two years, Florida has been among the top two states in reportable boating accidents (FWC, 2007). In 2006 there were 671 reportable boating accidents; in 2007, there were 670. Drowning accounted for 62% of the fatalities in 2006 and 55% of the fatalities in 2007. Falling overboard and capsized watercraft constitute the major types of accidents with males accounting for 90% of the fatalities in 2007. Of particular note, personal floatation devices (PFDs) were not worn by 27% of these victims (FWC, 2007). The actual number may be under-represented due to lack of information on accident forms (33 % provided no information) (FWC, 2007). Florida policy mandates PFD use, among adults, only during water skiing or personal watercraft (PWC) use and in children under the age of 6 years of age who are aboard a vessel less than 26 feet in length. All other boaters use PFD's on a voluntary basis. Although it is recommended that all occupants wear a PFD, it is believed that the usage rates remain small (Fl. Boaters guide).

Lee County, with a population of 571,344 residents in 2006, reported 32 boating accidents in 2007 with 5 fatalities, placing it among the top three boating fatality counties in Florida (FWC, 2007). In comparison to all counties, Lee County ranked fourth in accident rates for 2007 and fourth in unintentional injuries for the state (FWC, 2007 Vital stats).

Recognizing the need for greater voluntary PFD usage and a need for using a consumer orientation approach, Lee County Department of Natural Resources, Marine Program and

Florida Sea Grant has contracted with the University of South Florida Center for Social Marketing (CSM) to develop a strategic social marketing plan that will serve as a guide to increase voluntary use of PFDs among recreational boaters. Employing a community-based social marketing approach will identify ways to increase voluntary PFD use in identified, segmented populations, build local capacity through training of key partners and community stakeholders, and serve to promote program sustainability.

## **Research**

### **Research Objectives**

The following objectives will guide research activities:

1. Understand how participants perceive personal floatation devices.
2. Understand the emotional meaning wearing a personal floatation device holds for participants.
3. Understand the factors that motivate participants to wear personal floatation devices.
4. Understand factors that deter participants from wearing personal floatation devices.
5. Identify issues that compete with wearing a personal floatation device.
6. Understand how key informants perceive personal floatation devices and related issues (e.g., segments to target).
7. Understand how to promote personal floatation devices to identified segment/s.
8. Identify trusted spokespersons for personal floatation device use.
9. Understand how to reposition personal floatation devices.

### **Methods**

A qualitative approach including intercept and telephone interview was used to gather data need to address each research objective. Intercept interview participants received a \$10 gift card in exchange for their participation, and telephone interview participants received a \$40 gift card. The following sections detail sampling and procedures for each component.

### **Sampling**

Three segments were selected based on results of key informant interviews: recreational boater males, angler males, and wives of anglers and recreational boaters. A total of 30 intercept

interviews were done with anglers (N= 9), recreational boater males (N= 10), and wives of anglers/recreational boaters (N= 11). A total of 20 telephone interviews were conducted with anglers, male recreational boaters, and wives of anglers/recreational boaters. The average age of telephone interview participants was 59 years with a range from 43 years to 78 years.

## **Recruitment**

Center for Social Marketing Staff, Lee County and Florida Sea Grant staff were responsible for recruiting participants for telephone interviews. Lee County and Florida Sea Grant staff distributed flyers to local boating outlets (e.g., West Marine) and placed announcements in local newspapers. Potential participants contacted Dr. Alfonso and provided preliminary information (e.g., whether they were anglers or recreational boaters). Dr. Alfonso and Mary Martinasek then scheduled telephone interviews at a time that was convenient for participants. Center for Social Marketing staff explained the purpose of the study and their rights as research participants.

## **Instrumentation**

Interview guides were developed based on the research objectives. The intercept interview guide is included in Appendix A. The telephone interview guide is included in Appendix B.

## **Analysis**

Notes were taken during intercept interviews and entered into Microsoft Word documents, which were uploaded into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. All in-depth telephone interviews were audio-recorded. A waiver of written documentation of informed consent was received from the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, Social and Behavioral Sciences Division. Audio-recordings were transcribed, omitting identifiers.

The Center for Social Marketing research team reviewed results independently in the following steps: 1) review observer notes and transcripts, comparing transcripts to audio-tapes to ensure accuracy of transcription; 2) load transcripts into *Atlas ti*, a software package that allows text to be numbered, coded, and sorted; 3) create a coding guide based upon guiding research objectives and emergent themes; 4) code data using coding guide and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Straus, 1967); 5) compare codes for inter-rater consistency and adjust how categories/codes are assigned; 6) enter codes into *Atlas ti* so transcripts can be sorted by category (e.g., brand); 7) sort passages by category and review for recurring themes and diversity in responses. Within each topic, sorted passages for specific subgroups will be read separately to facilitate comparison of responses. Researchers will compare notes on each topic for consistency and agree on statements to be included in the research findings; and 8) create a final report.

## **Results**

### **Perceptions of Boating**

Boating in Lee County is a positive experience. Boaters described their state of mind when boating as “relaxed”, “tranquil”, “happy”, “peaceful” and “trouble-free”. Boaters overwhelmingly like the feeling of “being out on the water” and experiencing the “freedom” that boating provides. This sense of freedom was expressed as being able to boat wherever they wanted to and the opportunity to be away from work and other hassles “on land”. Some boaters enjoy the opportunity to spend time on the water fishing with friends, whereas others enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. A few boaters mentioned they enjoyed exploring the sea life.

*Just great to be out there. The best moment of the day on a sailboat is when you shut the engine off and start sailing but everything about it. We love the wildlife. Pine Island*

*Sound is absolutely full of wildlife. \_\_\_\_\_, turtles, mantas, birds in every description.*

Female Boater

*I just wanted to be out on the water. It's calming and relaxing for me. I just enjoy being out there.* Female Boater

*I find it very relaxing. It's just a great day to be out on the water enjoying the sunshine and the fishing. The outdoors.* Male Boater

*A day off and I needed to get off and not listen to passengers. I didn't have to be responsible for anybody. It was sightseeing and fishing.* Male Boater

### **The At-Risk**

Boaters were asked who should wear personal flotation devices when on the water and who is at risk for not wearing them. Many boaters felt that children and individuals who could not swim well along with the elderly should wear personal flotation devices. Some boaters felt that everyone should wear them. A small number of boaters cautioned against requiring all boaters to wear personal flotation devices. Many boaters feel that they could don them in the event of an emergency, denoting a false sense of security with "on board" PFDs.

*I think making it mandatory would be not a great idea because we've got enough government as it is. We don't need more people telling us more what to do but I think education is probably the answer.* Female Boater

*All right, definitely children should, and anyone who can't swim should. In all honesty, everybody should wear one.* Female Boater

*Younger kids probably all the time, and everyone if the sea conditions are a little rougher.* Male Boater



*Well, children always at all times on the boat. Unless they are down below. And then people who don't know how to swim should wear it all the time. And then people that are like me then should wear it in rough weather and at night. Male Boater*

*Well, I would probably guess that younger people, elderly people, you know. In the wintertime we just go out around the bridges and stuff, so you're pretty close to land all the time and something. I keep them real handy when I go out to the reefs where, like I said, you can just reach out and grab them if something went wrong. Male Boater*

## **Product**

Personal flotation devices-whether on or in the boat-offer boaters a sense of safety. However, boaters do not believe that personal flotation devices are necessary all of the time. Boaters consider the weather, water conditions, and size of the boat when determining when they need to wear a personal flotation device. If the weather or water is rough or if they're on a smaller, open motor boat or personal watercraft, they're more likely to wear a personal flotation device, increasing their feelings of safety. When the conditions do not warrant wearing a personal flotation device, boaters feel good. Without a personal flotation device, they're able to steer easier, fish, relax, be cool, and feel comfortable. One participant even suggested she felt "silly" wearing a personal flotation device when the weather was clear.

*I feel good [when not wearing a PFD]. I feel that I'm comfortable in deciding when I need it, and when I need it it doesn't bother me to put it on. Male Boater*

*Probably feel more comfortable [when not wearing a PFD]. Emotionally, I feel very safe because I have a good boat and my flotation devices are right next to me. Male Boater*

*Well, I put it on because I feel it's a necessity. How do I feel? I feel better I had it on. I put it on for a reason, though. Male Boater*

*Well, on our boat as I said in a normal Sunday afternoon sail I don't feel any worse when I'm not wearing it because it's statistically zilch that I'm gonna drown. But if we go on somebody else's boat, especially an open power boat, generally if I don't have it on I don't feel very good.* Female Boater

*Safer when it's windy out but silly when it's calm or pretty out.* Female Boater

One boater admitted to not being prepared with a personal flotation device when a storm blew up in the Gulf. Perhaps reminding boaters of the sudden nature of storms in Florida might encourage some boaters to wear their personal flotation devices – just in case.

*Actually, it doesn't bother me at all at this point; although I will say the last time I was out I wished I had it on as we were driving home. We should have put them on because we got caught in a storm. Scared the heck out of us both.* Male Boater

The current augmented product (i.e., the actual personal flotation device) suffers from stiff completion (i.e., feeling relaxed and free) and a design that is “cumbersome” or “bulky.” Some participants, however, discussed inflatables as an alternative to the older personal flotation devices, one that offers increased comfort. It is important to note, though, that even participants who had inflatables did not wear them all the time. They, too, wore their personal flotation devices when the conditions warranted it (e.g., bad weather, small boat).

## **Price**

“Bulky,” “cumbersome,” “hot,” and “uncomfortable” were the most frequently used words to describe personal flotation devices, including the newer inflatables. Obviously, boaters pay a price for the safety offered by personal flotation devices. Anglers, in particular, indicated that personal flotation devices make it difficult to steer and fish. Further, according to some

participants, personal flotation devices are “difficult to put on,” particularly for those who are larger in stature or for women with larger breasts.

*No, they're just bulky and uncomfortable. And on a boat usually getting in and out of a cabin, especially with a cabin boat, the doorways are usually very narrow, and a bulky life vest, you know, usually gets in the way.* Male Boater

*If we're fishing, to cast and everything - being able to move your body like that. Because it just hinders your movements, you know that type of thing. If I just want to sit there and relax, and I've got this big, heavy, bulky life jacket on, it's just not that comfortable.*

Female Boater

The ability to swim serves as a barrier to the use of personal flotation devices. Those who were avid swimmers were less inclined to wear a personal flotation device.

Results suggested having personal flotation devices on board to meet mandatory requirements served as a barrier to their actual use. Boaters indicated that they could put one on in a timely manner if needed.

*No, but we're very cautious of it and we keep them where we can grab them quickly. But we do not keep them on. We boat so much that it's uncomfortable. No matter how compact they are - we're all over the boat, and it's difficult to keep it on at all times.*

Female Boater

Some boaters, particularly those with larger boats, indicated that their boat was a safe place to be, thus, negating the need for a personal flotation device.

*Because we're on a sailboat and it goes pretty slowly. If we're racing in heavy weather then we do.* Female Boater

Finally, boater's confidence, many times gained after years of boating experience, served as a barrier to the use of personal flotation devices. Boaters who were confident that they could swim did not wear a personal flotation device. Boaters who had boated for years without incident did not wear a personal flotation device. Wearing a personal flotation device when the weather or water conditions do not warrant it (in boater's minds) goes against boater's common sense. Boaters *know* when to wear a personal flotation device and are confident that they can access one in time.

*Never have, never will; been boating for 50 years Male Boater*

### **Facilitators**

When asked what made it easy to wear a personal flotation device, many participants simply stated, "nothing." Some described owning inflatables as making it easier to wear a personal flotation device. Overall, results suggested poor weather conditions, being under the age of 12 years, being alone, boating at night, being in a small boat, or in rough, deep water facilitated the use of personal flotation devices.

*However, if the wind \_\_\_\_\_ up to 20, 25 and we're out sailing and the Gulf gets very rough because it's so shallow, yes. And if the two of us are sailing 100 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean in the Gulfstream and we're going to Maine, one of us at night has to sleep while the other one is on watch- so always. Female Boater.*

### **Place**

Place refers to locations where boaters are most open to receiving messages about the product (i.e., wearing personal flotation devices). Boaters offered several suggestions for placement, including television (i.e., commercials), newspapers, web 2.0 (e.g., Facebook,

Twitter, You Tube), boating magazines, the side of boats (i.e., a slogan), the boater registry (i.e., mail out information), and tide charts.

*Send them something in the mail. Send them something really cool. Send them a - I don't know what. Send them something groovy in the mail. Not a little \_\_\_\_\_ cell phone key chain because everybody gives those away but I don't know. Something. I don't know. I mean certainly there's not an awful lot of money available at this point, especially in Florida to do anything but. you know? A little flashlight? You know those cool little lights that you put on your keychain that you squeeze it and the light goes on? Female Boater*

## **Promotion**

Boaters were asked how Lee County could promote the use of personal flotation devices to other boaters. Overwhelming participants suggested making a new product that addressed the barriers discussed previously. A new personal flotation device should be like a vest – less bulky, ventilated, and comfortable. The new product should be stylish but less expensive, although boaters did not recommend a price point. Advertisements for the new personal flotation device should demonstrate how easy it is to put on and off.

*I would figure out a way to make it cool. If people like those NFL guys that died in Tampa had been induced to make a PSA, you know, a video that could be broadcast on TV or whatever, Twitter or any of those things. Facebook or YouTube. Saying, "I think it's cool to wear a life jacket and I never go out without one." Also if they made them cool looking. If they made, you know, inflatables designer colors or this or that or Ralph Lauren designed one and put his name on it people would probably be more apt to wear them I would think. Female Boater*

*That's hard. You know, I guess I heard there are some new ones out that once it hits the water then they inflate so that they've, you know, they're very light weight. But I heard they're also very expensive. If something like that came out that was, you know, it would be just like wearing a thicker t-shirt or something that would be wonderful if it was reasonable in price. I would go along with that. But until they become comfortable, I think it's going to be hard.* Female Boater

Several boaters suggested the inflatables and fanny packs were more comfortable.

However, it's important to note that boaters are not consistently wearing these when boating.

*I know that we do have - we have the suspenders. And they've more comfortable, and that's what I would wear in the dingy or something like that. Probably just comfort.*

*Probably just - probably comfort.* Female Boater

Other recommendations suggested by a few boaters included stressing safety, using word of mouth or example, using "horror stories," and using facts or statistics. Interestingly, a few boaters suggested that requiring personal flotation devices was a way to encourage passengers to wear their personal flotation devices.

Perhaps most importantly, boaters were against requiring boaters to wear personal flotation devices by law.

Boaters were asked who other boaters listen to about personal safety. Authorities (e.g., coast guard, marine patrol, sheriff), were the most frequently suggested spokespersons.

*Someone who's had a lot of experience in the water, like the Coast Guard or the sheriff or somebody with a lot of knowledge of what's happened around.* Female Boater

Many boaters suggested they would listen to other boaters. Whereas one participant suggest mothers should be the spokesperson, female participants suggest they listened to their

husbands when determining whether to wear a personal flotation device. A couple of boaters suggested another boater who had experienced a tragedy as a spokesperson.

*I think I would select a spokesperson that has had a tragedy and can speak from experience. Because I think everybody gets numb to everybody telling everybody telling what to do, and what they should do and what they shouldn't do. But when you hear someone speak from the heart, and they've experienced a tragedy and they can explain what happen. It's a clear, sunny day and my family is fine, and then all of a sudden I've lost someone, or something's happened. I don't have an individual in mind, and I don't think it necessarily needs to be a movie star or anybody like that. I think it needs to be everyday people who have experienced tragedy and learned from a bad decision.* Female

Boater

Other suggested spokespersons included sports figures, professional fishermen, and professional associations.

## **Discussion & Recommendations**

Results from a total of 50 interviews suggest boating in Lee County is a pleasurable activity, which leads to relaxation and freedom. Boaters, however, suggested that donning a personal flotation device disturbs this sense of relaxation and freedom by inhibiting movement during fishing, by removing the ability to get a suntan, and challenging the boater's sense of protective/responsibility knowledge. Specifically, boaters feel they can don a PFD in ample time in the event of foul weather or perceived troublesome area or condition. Boaters feel that knowing where the PFDs are located on the boat is sufficient in avoiding negative situations. They, however, may be unaware of the time component related to accidents and the possible inability to don a PFD in the amount of time required to protect themselves and their passenger

boaters. Other physical barriers associated with personal flotation devices (e.g., discomfort, cumbersomeness, heat producing) outweigh the perceived benefits of wearing them (e.g., safety, protection). Boaters repeatedly mention the bulkiness, lack of a comfortable fit, and inappropriate fit of PFDs as being barriers to usage. Boaters feel that being out on the water gives them the opportunity to avoid the hassles on land and the strict nature of their jobs. Challenges in encouraging voluntary wear rates will be in being able to provide boaters with a continued sense of freedom paired with the safety aspect of PFD usage. Other challenges will be to advocate for PFD use regardless of the swimming ability of the boater. Many boaters feel that their swimming ability negates the need for a PFD. Future efforts to promote the use of personal flotation devices in Lee County should begin with the development of an augmented product that overcomes the barriers mentioned (e.g., tee shirt like PFD). Efforts to promote the use of the new device should emphasize its association with freedom and relaxation, the core product. In addition, educational efforts to change the mindset of boaters as to who they perceive has the greatest need to wearing a PFD needs to encompass all boaters and not just children, those who cannot swim, and the elderly.

The next step is to develop and administer a survey that will provide quantitative estimates of components of the marketing plan (e.g., promotional strategy). Future research should inquire as to a maximum price point for a new product. Determining what boaters would be willing to pay for a comfortable personal flotation device is an important next step.



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## Appendix A. Intercept Interview Guide

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

### Intercept Interview Guide

- ~ My name is \_\_ and I work for the Center for Social Marketing at USF.
- ~ We're conducting brief interviews with boaters today about boating safety.
- ~ If you participate, you will be given a \$10 gift card to West Marine.
- ~ The results will be used to design a social marketing campaign to increase boater safety.
- ~ Would you be willing to talk to me for 15 minutes? '
- ~ If no, thank them and move on.
- ~ If yes, go over the following:
  - ~ Your assistance is important.
  - ~ The interview will take no more than 15 minutes.
  - ~ We're talking with people from the community about their experiences with boating and personal flotation devices.
  - ~ We are interested in all your ideas, comments, and suggestions.
  - ~ No right or wrong answers: want both positive and negative comments.
  - ~ Confidential – your name won't be attached to your comments in the report
  - ~ You don't have to answer every question.
  - ~ You can stop at any time.

Ok, let's get started.

1. Where are you going today?
2. What is the purpose of your boating trip?
  - Fishing
  - Recreation
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. What made you want to go boating today?
4. If you could only use word one word to describe how you feel while you're out on the water, what word would you chose?
5. What do you like most about boating?
6. When you're boating do you wear a PFD? \_\_\_\_\_
  - If yes, why?
  
  - If no, why not?
7. How do you feel when you wear a personal flotation device?
8. How do you feel when you don't wear a personal flotation device?
9. What makes it easy to wear a personal flotation device?

10. What makes it difficult to wear a personal flotation device?
11. Who do you think should wear personal flotation devices?
12. In your opinion, who's at risk for not wearing personal flotation devices?
13. How would you encourage boaters to wear personal flotation devices?
14. Who would boaters like yourself most likely listen to? Who would be your spokesperson?
15. Have you heard of the Wear It Florida campaign?  
Probe: Did it make you want to wear a personal flotation device?
16. Record gender: Male or Female
17. Record type of boat:
  - Kayak/Canoe
  - Open motorboat
  - Cabin motorboat
  - Sailboat
  - Pontoon
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
18. How many people are on the boat (including interviewee)? \_\_\_\_\_
19. How many children on the boat? \_\_\_\_\_
20. [Skip if no children] What are the ages of the children? \_\_\_\_\_
21. [Skip if no children] Are the children wearing PFDs?
  - Yes
  - No

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We just need to fill out the receipt form for your gift card.

## Appendix B. Telephone Interview Guide

Record from recruitment sheet: Recreational boater, Angler, Wife

Ok, let's get started.

22. What type of boat do you have?
  - Open motorboat:
  - Cabin motorboat
  - Sailboat
  - Pontoon
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
23. Where do you usually put your boat in? Where do you usually go?
24. Think about the last time you went boating. What made you want to go boating?
25. If you could only use word one word to describe how you feel while you're out on the water, what word would you chose?
26. What do you like most about boating?
27. When you're boating do you wear a PFD? \_\_\_\_\_
  - If yes, why?
  
  - If no, why not?
28. How do you feel when you wear a personal flotation device?
29. How do you feel when you don't wear a personal flotation device?
30. What makes it easy to wear a personal flotation device?
31. What makes it difficult to wear a personal flotation device?
32. Who do you think should wear personal flotation devices?
33. In your opinion, who's at risk for not wearing personal flotation devices?
34. How would you encourage boaters to wear personal flotation devices?
35. Who would boaters like yourself most likely listen to? Who would be your spokesperson?
36. Have you heard of the Wear It Florida campaign?

Probe: Did it make you want to wear a personal flotation device?

37. Record gender: Male or Female

38. Record type of boat:

- Kayak/Canoe
- Open motorboat
- Cabin motorboat
- Sailboat
- Pontoon
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We just need your complete mailing address for the gift card. The gift card will arrive with a receipt and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Please complete the receipt and send it back to us in the envelope.