

**Carol-Ann Giroday**

[www.writefromthesea.com](http://www.writefromthesea.com)

### **PFD's for Pets**

People are not the only beings who should wear a PDF (or life jacket) while boating. Once onboard, make sure your pet has their own life jacket. PFD's are made just for dogs and may be purchased at all major marine vendors as well as many pet stores. However, all PFD's are not created equal.

A good PFD will have flotation all around your animal's body, not just along their backs. These flotation devices are often inadequate to support a larger dog while in the water. The area that floats is often on the surface of the water rather than under and around your dog. The large dog ends up being minimally supported by the strip of flotation along their backs as they struggle to make their way back to the boat.

A good PFD for dogs will be brightly colored and have a large grab handle along the back of the jacket to either reach with a boat hook or your hand to assist in lifting the dog out of the water. Again, if you have a large dog, like Kona, you will want a jacket that has the flotation padding all around their body so when you pull them out of the water the belly straps are not cutting into their tender under belly. Getting a panicky animal out of the water is difficult, because their survival instinct takes over and they will claw at any solid object -- usually you.

If your dog has never worn a PFD they may be resistant to it at first. Give them time to get acquainted with it before actually getting on the boat. Get your pet used to the PFD in small steps. Start with wearing it in and around your home, then outside for short walks and finally aboard the boat. Make sure the PFD fits securely and allow your dog to practice swimming while wearing it.

### **Be alert at the dock and at anchor.**

Know where your pet is at all times. Accidents happen. At dock other dogs may be walking with their owner and a hullabaloo could develop, causing an accidental fall into the water. If they happen to fall between the dock and the boats it is very difficult to rescue them.

Friends of ours aboard their 42' North Pacific, while at anchor at Portland Island, one of BC's Gulf Islands, left their two Yorkshire terriers in their boat while they went to shore. It was a hot day and one of the windows was left open and their smallest dog got out onto the back deck and fell overboard. When they returned to find only one dog on board it was a condition they could not comprehend. For ten minutes they called and thoroughly searched the boat not wanting to consider the truth that their little dog was gone. After fifteen agonizing minutes they hear people calling to them from a dinghy at their stern and to their relief, there was their little dog, safe and none the worse for wear. Luckily, another couple anchored nearby saw the little terrier swimming frantically around the boat. Initially they thought it was a muskrat or a sea otter but when they saw the characteristic Yorkie red bow tied at the top of her head they knew she was a dog in trouble. They managed to scoop her up from their dinghy and keep her safe until her owners returned. It could have been a much different story with a very unhappy ending.

Miss Muggins, a miniature Schnauzer off the Grand Banks, MV Anderson Cove, was investigating the docks one morning near her boat and stepped off the dock onto a sizeable patch

of “flotsam and jetsam” that she thought was solid ground under her feet. She quickly found herself between her boat and the dock in her struggle to get back top-side. If her owners had not been nearby and heard the commotion she too could have met with a grievous end.

## **Resources**

Terrapin Communications Inc. They manufacture an immersion alarm, **The Safety Turtle**. A sensor that looks like a watch straps securely to the wrist, PFD or pet collar. In the event of a fall into the water, the alarm will sound in your vessel.

**[www.safetyturtle.com](http://www.safetyturtle.com)**

They also supply the electronic workings for a company based in California that invented a wireless lanyard system. **MariTech Industries** is the exclusive manufacturer of this “falls overboard protection”. While wearing a small sensor, about the size of a keychain fob, if a pet or person falls into the water an alarm will sound in the boat. A second feature will automatically shut off the engine reducing the likelihood of harm from the propeller(s) and minimizing separation between boat and person needing rescue.

**<http://www.powerboatsafety.com/vlunit.asp>**