

# PPE: Working Near and Over Water



Water presents a serious threat to you when you work near or over it — the threat of drowning. When drowning occurs, minutes count. Three to four minutes without oxygen causes permanent brain damage. No matter how good a swimmer you think you may be, the danger of drowning is real. When you fall into the water, you could strike your head and lose consciousness, your clothes could become waterlogged, or currents could overcome you.

So what can be done to prevent drowning? OSHA requires these life saving devices for work near or over water.

Life saving equipment:	Requirements:
Life jacket OR Buoyant work vest	Approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.
Used where the danger of drowning exists.	Inspected for strength and buoyancy defects before and after each use.
Not used if defective.	Ring buoy
Provided with at least 90 feet of line.	Located where readily available for emergency rescue operations.
Placed not more than 200 feet from another ring buoy.	Life saving skiff (small boat)
Equipped with both a motor and oars.	Located where immediately available at locations where employees are working over or adjacent to water.
Placed in the water or so that it is capable of being quickly launched and able to retrieve an employee from the water no more than 3 to 4 minutes from the time it enters the water.	When employees are above water, the skiff has at least one designated person present in the area to respond to water emergencies and operate the skiff. A communication system like a walkie-talkie, must be used to inform the skiff operator of an emergency and to inform the operator where the skiff is needed.

If impact hazards from falling are also involved, then fall protection must be used. However, the requirement for life jackets and buoyant work vests varies as follows:

If you are working on or under bridges and are:	Then you are:
Not constantly protected from falling into the water	Required to wear life jackets or buoyant work vests.
Constantly protected by safety nets, body harnesses, or guard-rail systems	Not required to wear life jackets or buoyant work vests because OSHA deems you to be adequately protected for the danger of not only falls, but drowning.

