
Research Project 616: Lifejacket Wear: Behavioural Change

Notice to all Recreational Sector Stakeholders

This MIN expires 11 March 2011

Summary

As part of the Agency's three year lifejacket awareness campaign the MCA is actively collecting data regarding lifejackets through a variety of means in order that the campaign is based on reliable evidence, that effort can be targeted, and that outcomes can be measured and evaluated. To accomplish the set target of increasing carriage and wear rates in the UK, the MCA commissioned User Perspective to undertake a research project to find out which people are not carrying and wearing lifejackets and what the best way is to encourage this audience to change their behaviour. The project completed in November 2009 and the results are now available online.

1. Introduction/ Background

1.1 User Perspective undertook a research project commissioned by the MCA and the RNLI to look at the behaviours involved in recreational boaters wearing or not wearing lifejackets.

1.2 They investigated and assessed all previous research on the subject, looked at accident data, conducted interviews with users at harbours and marinas and carried out stakeholder interviews in order to build up a picture of those at risk and the factors that contributed to lifejacket wear.

1.3 Using the evidence gathered they produced and tested a safety message designed to encourage recreational boaters to wear a lifejacket. Another set of user interviews was carried out to get feedback regarding the safety message and the findings were compiled in a report.

2. Project Findings

2.1 Lifejacket wear should not be targeted according to age or location. In the pre-safety message interviews, people who wore their lifejackets most of the time were on average 10 years younger than occasional or non-wearers; in the post-safety message interviews, lifejacket wearers were an average of 5 years older than non-wearers, despite the fact that the average ages of both samples were very similar. Additionally great variation was found in the percentage of wearers versus non-wearers who were interviewed where the same sites were visited twice. Simply put, safety interventions should be directed towards everyone.

2.2 This research found some low estimations of the degree to which a lifejacket aids survival in the water, indicating there is plenty to do in terms of educating people about just how much lifejackets can do to improve chances of survival in the water.

2.3 This research has illustrated that expected survival time and overboard experience has a close relationship to the overall evaluation of the threat posed by cold water shock. In turn, the perceived threat has a close relationship to lifejacket wear. This implies that in order to increase lifejacket wear, the specific aspects of the threat must be communicated.

2.4 The intervention, in the form of a poster, engaged the attention of participants extremely well according to the proportion of participants who had noticed it in these complex environments. The majority of the feedback was positive, with most people feeling that the image needed to be shocking to get the message across. Using the 'fear campaign' to communicate the message therefore appeared to be extremely effective in this situation.

2.5 The real challenge for encouraging lifejacket wear is to advance people into the 'adherence stage' of behavioural change. This is the stage in which changed behaviour becomes long-term. This phase can be self-reinforcing if several opportunities have emerged to try out the 'safe behaviour'. This is another argument in support of using training to give people a real experience of falling overboard so that the benefits of a lifejacket can be proven first hand.

3. Project Output

3.1 A full report including the full project recommendations can be downloaded from the MCA website.

More Information

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