

**Safe Kids USA  
Kids Don't Float Program  
Safety In and Around Open Water**

**The Best Life Jacket is the One You Wear**

Safe Kids USA launched the innovative water safety program, Kids Don't Float (KDF), to prevent open water drowning injuries and deaths in children. The program originated in Homer, Alaska, in response to the state's high incidence of child drowning deaths. Based on the success of the program, Safe Kids USA chose to expand the program to its national coalition network. KDF has two components: loaner board stations with an ample supply of life jackets for children to borrow for the day, and an interactive educational lesson to teach kids about open water safety.

**Kids Don't Float: The First Year**

In its inaugural year, Safe Kids USA members and local community advocates built 36 life jacket loaner board stations at 19 different water site locations and held more than 105 interactive educational sessions. In the sessions, children and their families were taught about wearing life jackets every time they are near or in open water. Collective reports indicate that more than 15,000 kids have been reached through the KDF educational events and lessons.



Kids Don't Float National Launch (Safe Kids Savannah, GA)

**Facts**

Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related death to children ages 1 to 14 years. As children age, the risk increases for drowning in lakes, rivers and oceans. In 2006, there were 474 drowning fatalities recorded among U.S. boaters; nearly nine out of ten of the victims were not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). The U.S. Coast Guard strongly recommends wearing life jackets and has maintained that this simple practice could prevent the majority of boating-related drownings that occur each year.

## Lives Saved

While near-drowning incidents are often underreported, promising stories and news reports do support the program's value. In fact, on August 25, two young boys capsized a canoe in ocean waters in Angoon, Alaska. One of the boys was a novice swimmer while the other did not how to swim at all. Because the boys borrowed a pair of loaner life jackets from the Kids Don't Float program before taking to the water, they were saved from drowning. This incident effectively made the two boys the 15th and 16th kids whose lives were saved in Alaska because of life jackets borrowed from loaner stations.



A grateful beneficiary of a Kids Don't Float life jacket (Safe Kids Alaska)

## Program Description

The life jacket loaner boards are strategically placed near popular open water sites so that kids and families may borrow the life jackets while going swimming or boating. The interactive educational lesson is intended for children ages 8-14 years, and can be held in schools or other community venues, sharing the safety messages about when, where and how to properly wear a life jacket. Children participate in fun activities on land, designed to safely expose them to the potential dangers in open water environments to increase risk awareness and the importance of using life jackets.



KDF Life Jacket Loaner Board Station (Tulsa Safe Kids)

### **Reports from Kids Don't Float Participants**

“[Kids Don't Float] teaches us how risky it is to go out on the water and drown. It taught me a lot about how to put on a life jacket and stuff so I'll be safe in the summer.”  
(Student, Savannah, GA)

“The program was very well-received by the students. The school staff members commented several times about how well the topic held the children's attention. Pre- and post-testing showed that the students' knowledge increased following the sessions.”  
(Coordinator, Safe Kids Wisconsin)

“The children loved learning about life jackets. I think we really enjoyed the hands-on wearing the life jackets and learning that picking the correct size life jacket is important. Some kids had life jackets on that were too small and some that were too large. Children seemed to learn a lot and they loved the whistles we distributed to each child along with education materials in a bag...”  
(Coordinator, Safe Kids North Coast, Oregon)

“It doesn't matter what it looks like, it matters how safe you are.”  
(Student, Savannah, GA)



Kids Don't Float Educational Session (Savannah, GA)

<sup>1</sup> “Kids learn about water safety.” WTOC11 News. 23 May 2008.  
<http://www.wtoc.com/global/story.asp?s=8373872>

<sup>2</sup> “Life jackets for kids.” The Coastal Source. WJCL Fox. 23 May 2008.