

SCHUTTEVAER

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By: Hans Heynen

Increase your chance of survival with a 'liferaftvest'

"A backpack that contains a life vest and a boat will increase the chance of survival from mere minutes to days."

This is a direct quote of Johan Stam of Sea Rescue Gear (SRG) International from Voorschoten. He developed this safety equipment along with Jack Stone and Richard Pender. "If you fall overboard into water of 4 to 8 degrees Celsius, by just wearing a life vest you will last no more than five minutes before you suffer from hypothermia. By using a life raft the isolation will increase the survival time to at least 48 hours."

Stam, Stone and Pender have been working on the development of this life vest and life raft for two years. They have been looking for the perfect combination of a SOLAS certified life vest with a one person life boat inside and an optional AIS-transponder. These three elements have been called the PS³ for Personal Sea Survival System. "We have been able to bring the weight down from 7 to 4.6 kilos. This includes a detection light, radar reflective tape and a sea anchor. We can add motion sickness tablets, small bags of fresh drinking water, a light stick and two flares if necessary."

Operation

The life vest is easy to put on. It closes on the front with a zipper. In between the legs is a crotch strap to prevent ride-up. The backpack with the raft inside is attached by a zipper on the back of the vest. For certification and maintenance the vest and boat can be separated.

When someone falls overboard and hits the water, the life vest self-inflates. The same happens with the raft, which comes out of the attached backpack. A safety line makes sure the raft does not drift away. The survivor pulls the raft towards him and climbs in the boat. This is easiest from the end, but it is also possible to climb in from the side. "The stability bags that hang in the water make the raft stable."

The raft also provides a transparent spray screen. A inflatable pillow on the bottom of the boat provides extra insulation between the body and the water.

"The raft is sealed well; it is like a sleeping bag around your body. The plastic see-through 'window' on the top lets the oxygen and air escape."

Price

Similar life rafts have been used by airforce pilots for decades. SOLAS regulations do not cover single person life boats, so only the vest needs a certification for now.

The weight of the PS³ can be lowered by 500 grams by changing the CO₂ gas tank, which is now used to inflate the raft. This can be replaced by a TNO certified aluminium tank. "However that tank is three times more expensive," Stam explains.

When using a steel bottle for the gas, the PS³ without the AIS-transponder comes to a selling price of around €2000,-. It can be used for smaller operations for salvages, tugs and offshore personnel.

“We are exploring the possibility of providing a number on bigger ships. When crew members are caught in a storm, they can wear these vests as a precaution. This product will save their life when they fall overboard. It is also a great product for fishing boats and sailers.”

Photos

