

# Firm's Personal Retriever Adds Spin to Lifesaving

BY MARTIN HILL

Editor

The statistics are grim. Each year, 5,000 Americans die of drowning. Most die in calm water and in 60 seconds or less. In many cases, the victims include would-be rescuers.

A San Diego company has designed a new lifesaving device that could change those odds.

Life-Safer Inc.'s Personal Retriever is designed to give emergency personnel a way to quickly retrieve a drowning person without putting themselves in jeopardy. Comprised of an aerodynamic cellular foam disk and 100 feet of internally spooled polypropylene rope, the device combines the virtues of a life ring, a rescue heaving line or throw bag, and a Frisbee.

Life-Safer President Paul Driscoll has been working on the device since retiring from the U.S. Coast Guard as a master chief boatswain's mate in the mid- 1990s.

"Water rescue gear has never really been updated," said Driscoll, pointing out that the life rings and heaving lines used in water rescues today are little different from the same devices used by seafarers for centuries.

Designed around the lifesaving mnemonic, "reach, throw, but don't go," the soft disk can be thrown Frisbee-like through the air up to 100 feet, and has enough buoyancy to keep a



**The Personal Retriever water rescue device was developed by San Diego-based Life-Saver Inc.**

conscious adult victim afloat. Once victims grab the disk, they can be pulled to safety.

Driscoll said the \$79, reusable Personal Retriever is the first lifesaving device to provide both enough buoyancy and reach to affect a rescue, and - unlike other rescue devices - the soft foam disk won't cause an injury if it strikes the victim.

The Personal Retriever was originally designed for use by professional first responders such as firefighters and police officers in calmer waters, such as rivers and lakes. However, it was recently tested locally by the Coast Guard and shown to be easier, quicker and more effective to use than the rescue heaving lines currently used by the service.

The device can also be used in ice rescues and as a backup to equipment normally used in swift-water rescues.

Driscoll said the Personal Retriever is being refined for easier use by lay rescuers, such as boaters and fishermen, which would make the lifesaving device available for the \$12.5 billion U.S. recreational boating market.