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GEAR TEST

Float on a Rope

New device provides buoyancy & retrieves victims

By Josh Krimston

You're cleaning your pumper when the tones go off: "Engine 38, lake water rescue, capsized boater." When you arrive on scene, you find a teenager 75 feet offshore struggling in the water next to his rapidly sinking rowboat. What do you do?

Do you send a firefighter in, hoping they won't become one of 150 first responders who drown each year attempting water rescues? Do you try tossing a line to the victim knowing that your throw bag has a range of only 30 feet? Maybe you opt to wait 10 minutes for lifeguards or your department's water-rescue team to respond, hoping your victim can keep his head above water until they arrive; of course, it takes only an average of 60 seconds for a person to drown.

To provide first responders a better option, Life-Safer Inc. of San Diego has developed the Personal Retriever, a water-rescue tool that combines elements of throw bags and life rings. The Personal Retriever looks like a large, floatable Frisbee with a retrieval rope attached. Rescuers can fling it from shore to a drowning victim up to 100 feet away, providing the victim buoyancy and giving rescuers a way to pull them to shore.

The Personal Retriever is constructed of soft, plasticized, UV-resistant polyethylene foam, reducing the likelihood of injury should it strike the victim in the head or face. The polypropylene retrieval



Lieutenant Brant Bass of the San Diego Lifeguard Service performs a textbook throw of the Personal Retriever into San Diego's Mission Bay.

rope wraps around a spool underneath the disk.

The disk provides 12 lbs. of buoyancy, and the rope is designed to separate from the disk if exposed to over 300 lbs. of pressure. The 17" disk is easy to stow on an ambulance, fire engine or boat.

The Personal Retriever proves simple to use with minimal training. And, you can easily redeploy it in a short period of time because you don't have to recoil it after the first throw. Life-Safer

PROS

- + 100' reach
- + 12 lbs. of buoyancy
- + Deploys/redeploys rapidly
- + Compact

CONS

- Not intended for swiftwater rescue

advertises redeployment within 45 seconds, but I did it in approximately 18 seconds. In a side-by-side comparison, I deployed and redeployed the Personal

PHOTO: STUART HARTLEY

Retriever three times for every one throw bag deployment. On re-deployment, the average rescuer can expect 75 - 90% reach, or 75 – 90 feet.

The Personal Retriever was designed for use in static water. The folks at Life-Safer stress you shouldn't use the Personal Retriever as a front-line swift-water rescue tool-only as a backup. Most fire departments have policies forbidding personnel from entering a

body of water to perform a rescue unless the rescuer has specific training and equipment. The Personal Retriever offers an effective means to provide buoyancy, create stability and effect recovery while decreasing the risk to first responders.

The Personal Retriever retails for \$79.99.** For further information about the Personal Retriever, contact Life-Safer, Inc. at 619-222-3467 or visit their Web site at www.life-safer.com.

Josh Krimston is a Firefighter/ Paramedic with the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District in San Diego County Calif. Krimston has been involved in EMS for 12 years and is the co-founder of EPIC Medic (Eliminate Preventable Injuries of Children), a nonprofit organization dedicated to integrating EMS and injury prevention.

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A FINAL WORD FROM LIFE-SAFER, INC.

Caution:

Police, Fire & EMS personnel responding to water emergencies should not be attempting "water-entry" rescues, but some do when it becomes apparent that specialized resources won't arrive in time and their attempts with existing equipment fail them.

Situation:

Due to size, most buoyant devices don't possess sufficient reach. To overcome this, some professionals have begun using non-buoyant devices to increase reach.

Sending a non-buoyant device to an "Actively Drowning Person" is not advisable!

The **PERSONAL RETRIEVER™** is the first rescue device which provides both sufficient reach & buoyancy and was designed specifically for the demands faced by "First-Responders" during drowning interventions. To effect the rescue or to expand the survival window until specialized resources arrive, the **PERSONAL RETRIEVER™** may prove to be the best option.

Specifications:

The **PERSONAL RETRIEVER™**; a throwable static-water rescue disk, is made of "soft closed-cell foam" with a rigid propylene base, which greatly reduces the risk of injury to potential drowning victims.

Reach: 100 feet
Buoyancy: 12 pounds*
Deployment time: 10 seconds or less
Retrieval / Re-deployment time: 45 seconds or less
Material: Soft Expanded Polyethylene Foam Top and Propylene Base
Diameter: 17 inches
Weight: 1.5 pounds
Training time: One hour or less
Rope: 650 pound test buoyant 3/16 inch polypropylene
Design: Aero-dynamic and hydro-dynamic rotating wing
Wind penetration: Full extension into 15-knot winds
Coating: Petroleum resistant plasti-coat



* The US & UK accept 50 Newtons / 11 pounds of buoyancy now required in the Type 50 Buoyancy Aids as sufficient to keep a conscious person afloat.

** as of 8/15/2002, the **PERSONAL RETRIEVER™** sells for \$89.95 (US) plus shipping and handling.