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ZODIAC OF NORTH AMERICA, INC.

**TO: The Marine News Media
United States Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety
Life Raft & Service Stations**

FROM: JJ. Marie

DATE: April 6, 2000

SUBJECT: IMPORTANT LEISURE LIFE RAFT SAFETY ISSUE

I am writing this letter, not only as a manufacturer (Zodiac, Avon, DBC and Autoflug), but also as a boater, a member of the National Boating Safety Advisory Council (NBSAC), a former director and officer of the United States Marine Safety Association (USMSA), a director of the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC), and perhaps most importantly, as a concerned citizen.

I urge you to give serious consideration to the following:

In the United States, the carriage of life rafts on pleasure boats is not required by law or by U.S. Coast Guard regulation. Therefore, the purchasing choice and servicing of life rafts is purely voluntary. Unfortunately, what has resulted (at an increasing rate) are boat owners who are much too often uninformed or misinformed on the correct type of raft best suited for their boating needs, and who do not understand the critical importance of properly maintaining life rafts.

This is a "life and death" issue, ignored too many times by too many boaters.

I would like to point out to all of you that a life raft is the ultimate piece of safety equipment and needs to be treated as such. It is my belief that the Coast Guard should become involved in some appropriate fashion with this important safety issue.

The boating public needs to understand that there are various types of life rafts; i.e., coastal, racing, offshore and aeronautical. Now, assuming the boater purchases the correct life raft, the biggest problem (bar none) then becomes the standard servicing or the lack thereof. Everyday, we learn of owners who fail to take their life rafts in for annual inspections.

Today, since life rafts are not regulated, a pleasure boater is under no obligation to either repack the life raft or have it repacked at proper intervals by someone who is trained and authorized to do so. Each life raft model is designed and manufactured for very specific needs, and includes a detailed manual and packing sequence. Failure to adhere to repacking procedures can be catastrophic.

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Mission Statement

Zodiac of North America strives to sell the best-valued watercraft through strict adherence to values of integrity, quality, continuous innovation and superior customer service. These values guide our relationships with everyone we serve, including consumers, dealers, the Armed Forces, the U.S. Government, our shareholders and associates.

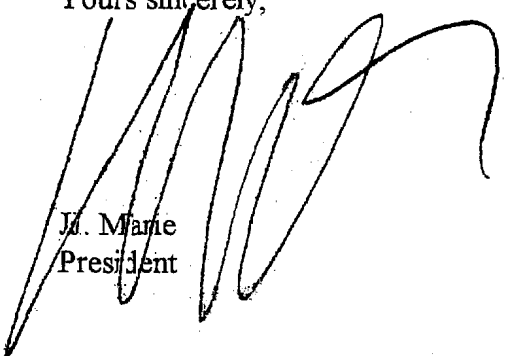
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I strongly believe it is time for the Coast Guard to make a ruling requiring that life rafts be repacked per the manufacturer's instructions, by individuals approved and trained by the manufacturer. In the case of commercial life rafts, this rule is currently in place. Additionally, the life raft manufacturer, the product, and the service station must also be approved by the Coast Guard. Are the lives of pleasure boaters any less valuable than those of passenger and commercial vessels?

I urge service stations, dealers, and members of the news media to encourage customers and readers to properly maintain this ultimate piece of safety equipment.

Yours sincerely,



J. Marie
President

P.S. It is most interesting to note that in many European countries, the carriage of life rafts of various categories is required if the pleasure boat travels more than five (5) miles from a harbor or refuge.