

LIFE-SAFER Makes a Better Lifesaver and Reaps Award

Everyone knows that staying safe is a rescuer's No. 1 rule. In water rescue that translates to "Reach-- Throw-- Don't Go," a guideline for trained professionals and non-professionals alike, especially when seconds count. But when available equipment falls short, people tend to jump in, risking a double drowning. That's why Paul Driscoll's water rescue invention, the Personal Retriever, manufactured by his San Diego-based company LIFE-SAFER, Inc., is winning accolades--along with an original patent. Call it the better mousetrap of lifesaving because it's so *low-tech* in the hands of rescuers, this high-concept tool promises to reduce the number of drownings that the U.S. suffers each year. So thinks UCSD CONNECT, at least. This globally recognized University of California-based public benefits organization recognizes and encourages promising technology and life science businesses in the San Diego area every year, serving as a benchmark for the region's most successful emerging technologies. It has awarded the Personal Retriever its 2004 Most Innovative New product (MIP) Award for General Technology.

Exceeds Standards

Despite being soft and lightweight, the rescue disk's familiar shape imitates the Frisbee's and can sail through the air as far as 100 feet. Its buoyancy exceeds the internationally recognized standard (50 newtons, or just over 11 pounds) to keep a conscious person afloat.

In all, Driscoll, who is a retired master chief boatswain's mate (BMCM) for the United States Coast Guard (USCG), identified seven criteria for an effective throw device by surveying rescuers over the course of two years. His goal for the device was to meet the highest standard for every criterion, a feat unmatched by any other lifesaving tool on the water, so say the disk's endorsers.

These criteria include:

- Buoyancy (12lbs.)
- Reach (Up to 100 ft. through 15 knot winds)
- Rapid deployment (10 seconds)
- Redeployment (45 seconds or less)
- Non-injurious (Soft outer foam cover)
- Simplicity (train in under an hour)
- Portability (17" x 3" and 1.5 lbs.)

Driscoll adds that its self-contained spool and rope swivels, allowing greater control and flexibility during deployment: and, while the 3/16" polypropylene rope tests at 650 pounds, it is engineered weaker at the point of swivel, to separate from the device--rather than breaking it apart--should currents prove too strong, allowing the victim to remain afloat while rescuers regroup.

Exceeds Expectations

On winning the MIP Award from UCSD CONNECT at a ceremony in La Jolla, CA, for the top 100 businesses, Driscoll says, "I was stunned, I was the only guy there not in a suit. I never dreamed we'd end up winning the whole category."

Supporters were less surprised. Driscoll quotes a San Diego trauma physician who compared it to the AED for its potential to save lives, pointing out, "you've essentially doubled and in some cases tripled the response zone from the shore. One need not be an epidemiologist to recognize that potential in lifesaving."



A San Diego firefighter demonstrates throwing the water rescue disk to a swimmer.



The LIFE-SAFER Personal Retriever with its 2004 UCSD CONNECT MIP Award for General Technology

Driscoll is excited to see his better rescue disk gaining ground, but he cautions that it does require some rudimentary training. "Joe Sixpack down at the marina may not understand that unfazed by a little training, however, professionals around the world in sailing, diving, fishing and rescue have endorsed it, including Peter Isler (two-time winner of America's Cup), Dominique Sumian (expedition leader for Jacques Cousteau and 50 out of 50 trainees with the USCG's Survival Systems). The Coast Guard is poised to name it as an approved device this year, according to Driscoll.

Saving Lives, Changing Minds

Perhaps more pertinent for community-based rescuers is the testimony that comes from a department in southern Arizona that had rejected the disk for their own environment of arroyos that flood with "chocolate water." A month later, says Driscoll, they called back after using it in desperation to save two little boys caught in a flash flood. A quick toss, and the boys grabbed it, locked onto it and scissored right over in the bank, where they were pulled ashore. "We'd like to revise our position," the rescuers told Driscoll.

"That's the whole idea, he says. "People grab that disk to their chest in a bear hug and it puts their airway and face right where we want 'em."

For more information, visit www.life-safer.com ♦ --KR