



# Paddler Safety

KAYAKS.CANOES.STAND UP PADDLE BOARDS.RAFTS

## Q. Why is paddler safety so important?

**A.** The number of people involved in some type of paddle sport is rising. Paddlers are now the fastest growing segment of the boating community. As the number of people turning to canoeing and kayaking – especially with rising fuel cost, so do the chances of someone getting into trouble.

In today's age of large, fast motorized craft and their wakes, human-powered craft are still among the most vulnerable to accidents and fatalities. Kayaks, canoes, and other slow moving vessels can be difficult to spot and cannot maneuver quickly enough to get out of the way of larger powerboats. The responsible boater recognizes the potential for a collision, and avoids close encounters between powerboats and paddle craft.

In 2011, 8 deaths were attributable to paddle craft. The use of properly fitted life jackets could have prevented nearly all those fatalities.

More than one third of all boating fatalities in Washington State since 2000 involve paddle craft. In 2011 the percentage increased to almost half. Considering the instability of canoes and kayaks and the risk to drowning or hypothermia from falls overboard, it is imperative that everyone onboard wears their life jacket.

## Q. Why does the USCG/State Parks/Law enforcement care about the safety of paddlers?

**A.** The nation's recreational boating safety program serves all boaters regardless of size, horsepower or waters used.

There are an ever-growing number of new paddlers who are attracted to the sport each year, which means many who take to the water don't have the experience to prevent or respond to an emergency. Rivers, coastal areas and remote shorelines are waterways where paddlers are seen boating. These are typically isolated areas with little assistance available in case of mishap.

Constant reminders of "safety first" will help ensure it doesn't fall on deaf ears.

## Q. Why is it so important for these boaters to wear life jackets?

**A.** The remote nature of many favorite paddling locations, coupled with the wet nature of the paddlesports and the dangerously cold and swift water levels in the spring mean the margin for error is narrow. Wearing a life jacket is essential and may be the last line of defense should something go wrong.

Some accidents on the water can produce impact and trauma injuries such as the impacts a whitewater river or coastal surf can produce or a collisions with powerboat. Too often accidents on these waters incapacitate an individual or render them unconscious. A life jacket will keep boaters from sinking below the surface and allow rescuers to reach them.

## SAFETY TIPS

- Start enjoying boating the right way, with a course to develop skills and safe operation. Paddle sports instruction is offered by local clubs, outfitters and many park and recreation departments.
- Pick an activity level that matches your ability and be sure your skill level is suitable for the water and weather conditions before getting underway.
- Always wear a properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Washington state requires all children 12 years of age and younger to wear a personal flotation device when boating.
- Have a signaling device. Carry a whistle, bright flashlight or flares.
- Carry a VHF radio and/or cell phone in a water proof bag.
- Bring essential safety and rescue gear including navigation tools, and more than adequate food, water, and extra protective clothing.
- Be visible – wear bright colors so others can see you.
- Going in the water is always a possibility. Be prepared for unexpected emersion. Learn how to self-rescue. Practice it in a safe place where others are around to assist you if needed
- Never use alcohol or drugs when boating or floating in a river. They dull important survival reflexes and impair decision-making skills.
- Children should never boat or float a river without the close supervision of an adult.
- Always paddle in groups of three or more.
- File a float plan – tell friends and family where you are going and when to expect you back.



### Boating Programs

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