ALWAYS WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Be Honest With Yourself

Never assume your skills are adequate for a given set of conditions, refer to a source.

The Right Boat for the Conditions

Most safety experts and boaters are designed for use on protected waters and moderate currents.

Specialized boats are used for whitewater, surf and exposed lakes or ocean. Know the capabilities of your craft. These venues require additional training.

Explore Your Limits Safely

Improving your skills is one of the joys of paddling. Practice in safe conditions with instructors or expert paddlers to expand your personal performance envelope.

Impairment = Accidents

Do not go paddling if you should not be driving. Drinks and drugs are even more hazardous on the water. Coast Guard and state BUI laws apply to all vessels, which includes recreational canoes, kayaks and SUPs.

FOR MORE ON FITTING LIFE JACKETS, GO TO: safeboatingcampaign.com/life-jackets

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Know Your Essentials

Carry Extra Layers

Carry extra layers of clothing in a waterproof “dry bag.” For longer outings, bring energy bars or a lunch.

Treat the Forecast as the Best Case

When the forecast calls for ideal paddling weather, it will probably be a beautiful day—but don’t count on it.

Don’t forget to check tides or river levels, and note the time the sun will rise and set.

Prepare for the Worst Case

Be aware of how changing weather affects paddling, and plan accordingly.

Communications

A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) will relay your precise location to rescue agencies if you’re in distress. Carry a cell phone in a waterproof case, and always be sure to tell a friend before you go.

A handheld VHF radio allows you to communicate with the Coast Guard and commercial boat traffic. Use Channel 16 for emergencies.

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BE SMART, BE SAFE

HAVE FUN

A BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO SAFER PADDLING

Make it Fit

Adjust your life jacket so that it’s snug and comfortable. It should not lift up when pulled by the shoulders.

Modern life jackets come in all sizes, with models for children, women and men.

Don’t Tempt the Odds

85% of fatal canoeing accidents and 84% of fatal kayaking fatalities involve people who were not wearing a life jacket. Don’t be a statistic. Wear your life jacket.

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Take a Paddling Class

What You'll Learn

- Safety: You’ll learn and practice the skills that make paddling safe and enjoyable.
- Style: You’ll learn good paddling technique from skilled instructors.
- Experience: You’ll paddle in a variety of environments, including open water and fast-flowing rivers.

Why It’s Fun

- The thrill of being on the water, testing your skills in a safe and friendly environment.
- The opportunity to meet new people and make lifelong friends.
- The chance to explore new places and experience the beauty of nature.

Where to Find a Class

- Check with your local paddle shop for a list of paddle classes in your area.
- You can find a list of ACA-certified instructors at americancanoe.org/instruction.

Dress for Immersion

- Cold Water: If you fall in cold water, even for a short time, your body will lose heat quickly.
- Modern Miracles: Today’s paddling gear uses high-tech fabrics and technology to keep you dry, comfortable, and looking your best.
- A wetsuit or drysuit allows you to stay warmer when immersed in cold water.
- Ask your local paddling shop to recommend clothing for the conditions you plan to paddle in.

Dress Your Children Well

- Remember: Children lose body heat faster than adults.
- Smaller adults lose body heat faster than large adults.

Dress For Visibility

- Choose brightly colored life jackets and paddling clothing that will make it easier for others to see you on the water.
- Carry a light, especially if there’s a chance you’ll be on the water early or late in the day.
- High visibility strobes and running lights are available at your local paddling shop.

Practice Defensive Paddling

- Never assume that power boaters can see you.
- Avoid high-traffic areas whenever possible, and proceed with caution when you can’t avoid them.
- Be aware of factors like fog and glare that make you more difficult to spot.
- If you’re between a powerboat and the sun when it’s low on the horizon, the operator almost certainly won’t see you.

Know the Rules of the Road

- Learn the ‘Rules of the Road’ that govern all boat traffic, from kayaks to container ships.
- Knowing these simple rules will help you anticipate where other boats will go, and allow you to stay out of trouble.

Tell a Friend

- Share your plan.
- Telling a trusted friend where and when you plan to paddle ensures that someone will know where to send help if you get into trouble.
- Make it routine.
- Keep a basic float plan on your computer or phone, and make a habit of filling it out and sending it to a friend every time you paddle.
- Include the Four Ws:
  - Who: Your name and the name of everyone paddling with you.
  - Where: Your planned put-in, takeout and paddling route.
  - When: Your estimated launch and return time—and when to notify authorities if you don’t check in as scheduled.
  - What: A plan for what to do if you don’t return or check in as scheduled.

Cold Kills

- The human body loses heat about 25x faster when immersed in cold water than it does when dry.
- Avoid cotton clothing like t-shirts and jeans, because they retain water and accelerate cooling when wet.

Modern Miracles

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