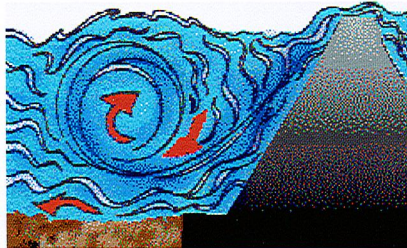


Know the Conditions

FOR FLATWATER

- Remember to watch for water and weather changes - beware of fog
- Keep an eye out for other boat traffic
- Pay attention to all safety warnings
- Be sure you are visible
- Have emergency lights
- Keep your shoes on
- Remain prepared for an unanticipated swim

FOR WHITEWATER AND RIVERS

- Stay on the inside of bends
 - Use adequate flotation in your craft
 - Walk around low-head dams
 - Watch for hydraulics.
- 
- Looking downstream, if a hole is “smiling” it is probably friendly. If it’s “frowning”, it is probably unfriendly.
- Beware of strainers!
- Strainers are Fallen trees; bridge pilings, undercut rocks or anything else that allows the current to flow through it while holding you. Strainers are deadly.
- **If in doubt, get out and scout!**
 - Avoid loose line entanglement

FOR COASTAL AREAS

- Stay close to shore
- As you travel away from shelter, make sure you have the necessary skills to travel back.
- Watch conditions for winds and fog
- Understand wave height, wind speed (Beaufort Scale), fetch and how it will impact your travel
- Stay aware of all boat traffic and traffic patterns
- Learn re-entry techniques BEFORE you need them, know how to re-enter your boat and how to assist others back into their craft
- Stay apprised of tidal currents and their affects on you and your boat
- Watch for landing in surf or passing through the surf zone to shore

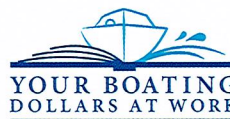
Vessel Safety Check (VSC)

Even if you pay careful attention to safety, problems can crop up on the best-maintained boat. That’s why the U.S. Coast Guard recommends that all recreational boaters take advantage of the free Vessel Safety Check (VSC) program every year.

VSCs are offered by experienced members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the United States Power Squadrons®, two of the nation’s premier volunteer boating safety organizations. A VSC is your best way of learning about problems that might put you in violation of state or federal laws. For non-powered boats under 16 feet, the requirements are very simple. Here’s a checklist:

Item (may not be required in all locations)	yes	no	n/a
Display of numbers			
Registration			
Personal Flotation Devices			
Visual Distress Signals			
Sound Producing Device			
State and/or Local Requirements			
Navigation Lights			
Overall Boat Condition			
Recommended items			
Marine Radio			
First Aid Kit			
Bailer/ Dewatering Device			
Inland Visual Distress Signals			
Discussion Items			
Accident Reporting			
Nautical Charts (offshore)			
Survival Tips/First Aid			
Float Plan/Weather and Water Conditions			
Safe Boating Classes			

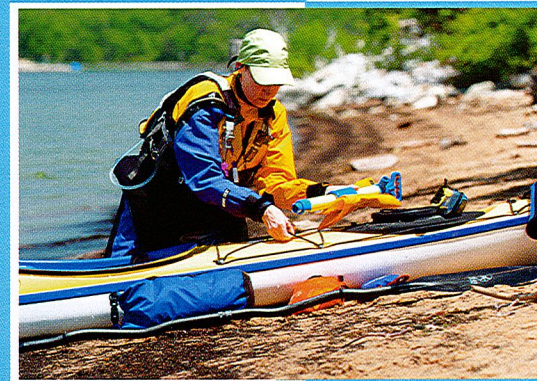
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Part of ACA's Paddle Safe, Paddle Smart Series

Paddler's Safety Checklist



ALL PADDLERS NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR:



LOW LIGHT CONDITIONS

WAYS TO CONTACT HELP

MINOR MEDICAL
EMERGENCIES

OUTINGS WHICH EXTEND
PAST THE ESTIMATED
RETURN TIME

WEATHER PATTERN
CHANGES

OTHER TRAFFIC

Paddler's Checklist

- ☐ **BE A SWIMMER** Know the difference between, and when to use, aggressive and defensive swimming
- ☐ **FILE A FLOAT PLAN** Write down where you intend to put in, take out and when you expect to return. Give it to someone who WILL call for assistance if you don't return on time.
- ☐ **WEAR A LIFEJACKET (PFD) AND KEEP IT SNUG**
- ☐ **ASSESS YOUR BOAT'S FLOTATION NEEDS** For flotation to work effectively it must fit snugly into the craft and be securely tied into place.
- ☐ **CARRY A SPARE PADDLE**
- ☐ **ALWAYS DRESS FOR AN UNEXPECTED FLIP**
- ☐ **WEAR A HAT OR HELMET** A helmet is important where upsets are likely or when sprayskirts or thigh restraints are in use. A hat protects from the sun.
- ☐ **CARRY A COMPASS AND CHART OR MAP OF THE RIVER** Know where you are and how to get out in an emergency.
- ☐ **CARRY A WHISTLE OR SOUND SIGNALING DEVICE**
- ☐ **CARRY THROW BAGS AND OTHER RESCUE GEAR**
- ☐ **CARRY A RIVER KNIFE** When there are ropes and rigging, a knife is needed. This includes throw bags and throw ropes.
- ☐ **BILGE PUMP AND/OR BAILER** Important for those in open water, always carry some device that can get water OUT of the boat.
- ☐ **SELF-RESCUE DEVICES SUCH AS PADDLE FLOAT, SLINGS, AND TOW ROPES**
- ☐ **SUNSCREEN**
- ☐ **DRINKING WATER & SNACKS**
- ☐ **LIGHT/SIGNAL (FLASHLIGHT OR LIGHT STICKS)**
- ☐ **PROPER FOOTWEAR**
- ☐ **UV EYE PROTECTION** Choose a good pair of sunglasses and a strap.
- ☐ **DRYBAG** Pack dry clothing and emergency gear. Cameras and cell phones also need to stay dry.
- ☐ **APPROPRIATE CLOTHING** Always dress for the weather and know what to expect. Temperature changes can occur rapidly. Layering clothes insulates in cool weather better than a single garment.
- ☐ **FIRST AID KIT WITH MATCHES**
- ☐ **DUCT TAPE/SMALL REPAIR KIT**
- ☐ **VHS RADIO AND GPS LOCATOR IF VENTURING AWAY FROM SHORE IN A COASTAL OR WILDERNESS AREA**

Be a Leader!

Pre-Trip Planning

- Know the waters to be paddled. River guide booklets and topographic maps are valuable references in trip planning. Plan alternate routes.
- Set-up locations for put-ins and take-outs along with possible lunch break stops. Consider time and distance. Arrange for the shuttle.
- Equipment - What you take with you on a trip is all that you have to survive and rescue yourself. This includes water, food, maps and charts, rescue equipment and extra clothes.
- File a Float Plan with someone who will notify others if you don't return on time.
- Participant Responsibilities - Unless the trip is an instructional or a commercially guided trip, most trips are of a common adventure trip format where each participant takes responsibility for personal participation, the selection of appropriate equipment and the decision to run or scout rapids. More experienced paddlers should assist those with less experience in making proper decisions on the trip.
- Paddle within both your, and your group's, limits.

On Water Behavior and Etiquette

- Be a competent swimmer with the ability to handle oneself underwater, in moving water, surf or current.
- Have a properly fitted lifejacket (Personal Flotation Device - PFD), and **WEAR IT!**
- Keep the craft under control. Do not enter a rapid unless reasonably sure you can navigate it or swim the entire rapid in case you capsize.
- Be sure to keep an appropriate distance between craft (a good general rule is to keep the craft behind you in view). Normally, stay behind the lead boat and in front of the sweep boat. Both the lead and sweep boats should be experienced boaters.
- Keep a lookout for hazards and avoid them. Watch for fog, especially on coastal waters.
- Know your emotional and physical limitations. Group members need to constantly assess the behavior of others in their group.
- Respect the rights of anglers and land owners when paddling.