



May 30, 2020

MARINE SAFETY INFORMATION BULLETIN (MSIB) 02-20:

PADDLE CRAFT SAFETY

Paddle sports continue to be the fastest growing segment of recreational boating, and the Coast Guard urges paddlers to paddle smart and be safe while having fun. **In previous years, the majority of paddle craft fatalities in the northeast involved people who were not wearing a life jacket.**

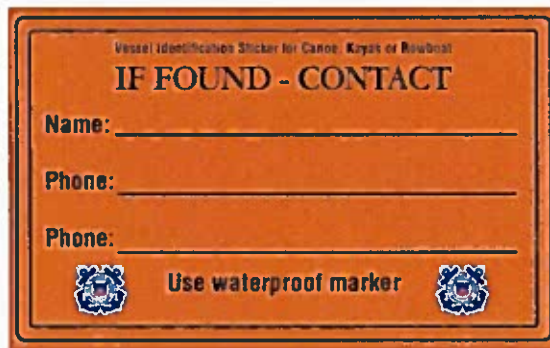
The Coast Guard strongly recommends that all paddlers follow these best practices:

- **Take a boating safety course!** Approved courses can be found at <https://www.nasbla.org/education/approved-boating-courses>
- **Always wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket!** Once you are in the water, it is almost impossible to put it on.
 - Children are required by CT and NY state law to wear a securely fastened Coast Guard approved life jacket **at any time** during the year.
 - In NY, paddlers are required by state law to wear a life jacket between November 1 and May 1. Properly fitting life jackets are required to be onboard at all times.
 - In CT, paddlers are required by state law to wear a life jacket between October 1 and May 31. Properly fitting life jackets are required to be onboard at all times.
- **Check the weather!** Look up the marine forecast, including wave heights, provided by the National Weather Service for the area you intend to paddle (<https://www.weather.gov/marine/>).
- **Carry a waterproof, hand-held VHF radio.** This is the best way to broadcast a distress situation to any nearby boaters and the Coast Guard.
- **Carry a sound producing device** such as a whistle.
- **Don't paddle alone!** Paddling with others reduces risk to an individual in the event of an emergency and increases the chances of being seen by powerboat or sailboat operators.
- **Don't drink alcohol** and operate a boat or paddle craft.

Some additional safety tips for all paddlers:

- **Dress for the water temperature.** At the start of the boating season, air temperatures get much warmer while water temperatures remain deceptively cold. Always check the weather forecast before paddling and dress for the water temperature, rather than the air temperature. Sometimes, especially when water temperatures are under 60°F, wet or dry suits are most appropriate for paddling.

- **MARK YOUR PADDLE CRAFT** with “if found - contact” stickers to avoid false alarms and unnecessary search efforts should the paddle craft break loose and drift off. These stickers can be found at retailers, Coast Guard units, and State Boating Safety Offices. At a minimum, use a waterproof marker or any permanent means to mark your name and contact information directly on your vessel’s hull.
- **Leave a float plan** with someone staying ashore, letting people know your plans on the water and when you expect to return ashore. A float plan provides emergency responders with valuable information they would need in order to search for a distressed or overdue boater. Information on a float plan and how to obtain a blank float plan can be found at <http://www.floatplancentral.org/> or use the CG app at <https://www.uscg.mil/mobile/>
- **Understand your physical limitations and endurance.** Paddling can be strenuous exercise. Know techniques for self-rescue, as well as how to rescue fellow paddlers.
- **Understand the limitations of your paddle craft.** There are different types of paddle craft design. Some kayaks are designed for touring and are capable of carrying significant amounts of gear for longer trips. These types of kayaks may cost several thousand dollars. Others, such as inexpensive, entry-level kayaks, are generally designed for protected waters, near-shore waters or water such as that found on lakes and slow moving rivers when paddling trips will be of a shorter duration.



COVID-19: Boaters are responsible for knowing and complying with their state and local public health policies and are encouraged to check with their local marinas and city offices for any COVID-19 related restrictions, before going out on the water. Make sure you boat responsibly and keep you and your family safe by staying up to date on the latest COVID-19 guidance at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). At a minimum, you should paddle only with members of your household and avoid paddling if you feel sick.

For more information, check out these websites:

National Safe Boating Council, <http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/>

U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety: <http://www.uscgboating.org/index.aspx>

Vessel Safety Check: <http://www.vesselsafetycheck.org/>

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary web page, <http://www.cgaux.org/>

NOAA Rip Current Awareness: <http://ripcurrents.noaa.gov>

We wish you a fun and safe paddling season!

K. B. REED
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 Captain of the Port, Long Island Sound