

Coast Guard urges preparedness during National Safe Boating Week-

May 20, 2024



In support of National Safe Boating Week, held from May 18 to 24, the Coast Guard urges all recreational boaters and recreational paddlers throughout the Pacific Northwest to exercise caution and become knowledgeable on water safety in preparation for the 2024 boating season.

As the weather improves, and many members of the public return to the water, the Coast Guard reminds all residents that weather conditions remain variable. Many of the accidents and deaths on the water can be prevented with simple and effective measures: boaters' education, life jacket usage, and trip preparation.

The highest group at risk are boaters and water sports enthusiasts exposed to the elements on small crafts, especially paddleboards and kayaks. The vulnerability to the elements and physical demand of their activity can cause even experienced sportsmen and swimmers to become exhausted and unable to return to shore, with long exposure being a potentially fatal risk factor.

Education and foresight are the biggest determining factor of safety on the water. In all accidents, the five primary contributing factors are operator inattention, operator inexperience, improper lookout, machinery failure, and excessive speed.

To enjoy a safe day on the water, the Coast Guard recommends the following steps:

- **Check the weather.** Check the marine weather forecast prior to setting out on the water. Boating Safety Tips and Resources (weather.gov)
- **Wear the appropriate attire.** Boaters and paddlers should always wear the proper protective clothing for the water temperatures they are recreating in (such as a dry suit). The waters of the Pacific Northwest are deceptively colder than the air temperature, especially in the early spring and summer months. This risk is not often recognized by inexperienced paddlers until they find themselves in the frigid water after capsizing or falling overboard.
- **Wear a life jacket.** The Coast Guard urges all boaters and paddlers to wear (not stow/bring) a properly fitted Coast Guard-approved lifejacket. Donning a life jacket is much harder once you're in the water, especially if you're fatigued or injured. Wearing an improperly fitted life jacket is just as deadly as not wearing one at all.
- **Mark your craft.** Placing an "if found, please call" sticker on your paddle craft, with your contact information, can not only get your craft returned to you quickly should it accidentally drift away, but it can also help rescuers to determine the type of response needed. If you're looking for stickers you can contact your local marine law enforcement agency, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power and Sail Squadron, or local Coast Guard unit.
- **Take a boater safety course.** Research shows that boaters believe they are boating safely if they have proper equipment and training, though statistics show that safe boating is a matter of their own behavior. Boating Safety Education (cgaux.org)
- **Get a Vessel Safety Check.** Get a free Vessel Safety Check inspection from the Coast Guard Auxiliary. VSCs are offered by experienced members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. A VSC is your best way of learning about problems that might put you in violation of state or federal laws, or worse, put you and your passengers at risk when out on the water. Vessel Safety Checks (cgaux.org)
- **File a float plan.** Always let a friend or family member know when you will be recreating on the water. When going on longer ventures, creating a detailed itinerary of your plan; when you are arriving and departing, a means of communicating, the number of passengers, and where you are traveling to; will enable the Coast Guard to initiate an expedient response in the event of an accident. If you're unsure about what information to share, use a Coast Guard template! Float Plan (uscg.mil)
- **Boat sober.** Never boat under the influence. It is illegal to operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Alcohol use is the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating incidents.

· **Know who to call in an emergency.** Your first call when in distress, 9-1-1 and they will connect you to Coast Guard unit or equivalent agency that can initiate a response. If outside of a cellular servicing area, carry a VHF radio set to channel 16, the International Hailing and Distress channel. When hailing out distress, use the signal word “Mayday!” and provide the following: your location, the number of people in your party, the nature of your distress, a description of your vessel/craft, and if everyone in your party is wearing life vests. These are the most essential pieces of knowledge for the Coast Guard to initiate an effective response.