

Paddlecraft Safety

By Captain Richard J. Schultz

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This summer, the Coast Guard and partner agencies are focusing efforts to educate paddlecraft users on how to “have fun, be safe, and paddle smart.” Unfortunately last year, 28 paddlecraft users died in Northeast waters (Maine to New York). These fatalities were due to capsizing/falling overboard and not wearing a life jacket. Paddlesports continue to be the fastest growing segment of recreational boating, with more than 300,000 paddlecrafts (canoes, kayaks and paddle boards) being sold annually. Paddlecrafts are an extremely affordable entry point to recreational boating, which is attractive to new boaters, boaters downsizing from larger boats, and those interested in exploring their waterways.

As the Sector Commander for Coast Guard Sector Southeastern New England and responsible for Search and Rescue operations across Rhode Island and Cape Cod and The Islands, I want everyone to be safe on the water and urge every paddlecraft user to wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket and affix a completed ‘If Found’ sticker to their paddlecraft (available at local Coast Guard units or the Coast Guard Auxiliary).

The Coast Guard also **strongly recommends** that all paddlesport enthusiasts participate in boating safety education as well as taking paddlecraft specific skills training. Additionally, the following best practices should be considered every time before going out on the water:

- Always wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket
- Make yourself seen (bright / contrasting clothing)
- Carry a sound producing device such as a whistle
- Carry a VHF radio
- Know your paddling limits
- Know the area where you will be operating
- Avoid paddling in main channels of busy waterways when possible
- Dress appropriately for the water temperature and forecasted weather
- Don't paddle alone
- Tell a friend where you are going and when you will return - file a float plan.
- If you plan to be out after dark, you will be required to exhibit an all-round light or have a flashlight readily available
- Don't drink alcohol and operate a boat or paddlecraft

A free Coast Guard Mobile App includes many resources including a function to file a float plan.



Paddle Smart Identification Sticker

IF FOUND - CONTACT

Phone 1: _____

Phone 2: _____

Name: _____

Use waterproof marker