



# SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



## NONMOTORIZED BOATING BEST PRACTICES

Going out on a nonmotorized boat can be an exciting experience. However, you must ensure that boaters stay safe while engaging in this activity. Being aware of the dangers associated with boating can help you properly prepare for and respond to its associated risks. Keep reading for more information on types of nonmotorized boats, their potential hazards, and safety precautions to implement on the water.

There are several types of nonmotorized boats:

- Kayaks
- Canoes
- Rowboats
- Inflatable boats
- Sailboats
- Rafts
- Paddleboats
- Dinghies
- Stand-up paddleboards

Each watercraft is unique. While some safety measures may apply to multiple types of boats, others may require specific precautions.

Boating accidents can happen at any moment, and it's crucial to be aware of the risks you may encounter on the water.

Considering the lack of experience boaters may have operating nonmotorized boats, and that water conditions can change quickly, the challenges boaters may face are numerous. Here are some common boating hazards:

- Difficulties entering or exiting boats and other capsizing incidents.
- Adverse weather conditions & unpredictable water currents.
- Exhaustion and fatigue concerns.
- Cold water and hypothermia risks.
- Sun exposure and dehydration complications.
- Downed trees and other submerged blockages can trap the watercraft or people.
- Overhead power lines, overhanging branches, or other sweepers.
- Other boats.
- Dangerous marine life, wildlife, and insects.

Boating accidents can place operators' and passengers' health and safety at risk. As such, it's essential to engage in proper planning prior to getting out on the water and be prepared to promptly respond to hazardous situations. Follow these tips to avoid and address dangerous conditions when managing nonmotorized boats:

1. Keep the boat steady as someone enters or exits it. Boaters should maintain proper posture and balance and minimize actions that could rock the boat.
2. Check water levels and weather and tide forecasts prior to heading out on the water. Make sure conditions do not exceed boaters' skills and experience levels; don't forget to account for their swimming abilities.

3. Ensure each boater is equipped with a properly fitted, Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (e.g., a life jacket).
4. Pack necessary equipment within the boat, including a first-aid kit, map, safety whistle, food, and water.
5. Encourage all boaters to dress for the weather conditions at hand and wear high-visibility clothing. Boaters may also need to prepare for sun exposure and/or cold water with proper gear. Ensure each boater packs an additional set of clothing in a waterproof container.
6. Carefully plan the route and make sure to check it after rainfall and storms. Stay away from waves, high winds, and heavy boat traffic, and make sure boaters can reach access spots at all times.
7. Avoid low-head dams, large and undercut rocks, sweepers, strainers, submerged objects, and other hazards.
8. Follow boating right-of-way rules.
9. Prepare a float plan and tell others of your schedule and location.
10. Know the threats of marine life, wildlife, and insects you may encounter and how to mitigate those risks.
11. If the boat capsizes, don't panic. Account for all boaters and stay with the watercraft. Boaters may paddle or push the boat to the shore if they are capable, and they should signal for help if they become distressed or need assistance.
12. Be familiar with the boat manufacturer's instructions regarding safe use and maintenance. It's also beneficial to know applicable water rescue and first-aid techniques.
13. Stay focused and alert while on the water, and do not engage in boating activities, including supervising them, if you are impaired in any way.