



CANOE-KAYAK-SUP-RAFT-RESCUE

The American Canoe Association (ACA) is a member-based nonprofit organization 501(c)(3) that promotes fun and responsible canoeing, kayaking, stand up paddleboarding and rafting. Founded in 1880, the ACA actively advocates recreational access and stewardship of America's water trails. For more information and to become a member, visit www.americancanoe.org.



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Making the world a better place to paddle! Since 1880.

River Paddler's Guide to Rescue



KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Wear your lifejacket!
- Be properly clothed and equipped
- File a float plan
- Learn and practice essential rescue skills
- Carry a throw-bag and practice regularly
- Seek out ACA-certified instructors for paddling instruction, and in river safety & rescue skills
- Paddle safe and paddle often



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Part of ACA's Paddle Safe - Paddle Smart Series

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Essentials of River Safety

An experienced paddler never takes safety for granted. Every paddler should practice and be competent at self-rescue, and be able to help others with simple assisted-rescue techniques. Seek out training, and learn quick, uncomplicated methods to help your paddling buddies, as well as how to use a few simple pieces of safety gear. All paddlers should wear a USCG-approved, properly fitted life jacket, appropriate protective clothing, including secure footwear, and have a throw-rope, knife, and sounding device. Bright lights should be carried for low-visibility conditions.

Preparation and Prevention

Know before you go! This means reading guide books, checking with outfitters, or talking to other paddlers with experience on the river you intend to paddle.

Learn to recognize potential hazards, and use good judgment to avoid them. Inclement weather, flood waters, and natural or man-made obstructions are all danger signs.

Be conservative! Paddling can be safe, and should be fun. Walk around, or leave a wide margin surrounding hazards. Reschedule trips when conditions are simply too dangerous; for instance, during floods or extreme cold.



As soon as you find yourself in the water, assume a defensive position. This means lying on your back, legs pointing downstream. Arch your back to stay as close to the surface as possible and avoid bumping the bottom. Keep your feet on the surface. This helps you avoid foot-entrapment, one of the most common river hazards.

Angle your head toward the closest, safe shore and back-stroke to safety. If you are being swept rapidly toward a hazard you may need to roll to your side into an aggressive swimming position to more quickly reach safety, but stay flat along the surface until you reach shallow, slow water.

Hold your boat and paddle with one hand and swim with the other if it is safe to do so.

Otherwise, let go of your gear and take care of yourself first.

Shore-Based Rescues

Ropes can be useful in assisting swimmers to shore. Throw-ropes can be either stored in a throw-bag designed for quick and easy deployment, or just loosely coiled. In either case, the rope itself should float, and be brightly colored for easy visibility. Because of their simplicity and speed of operation, throw-bags are recommended.

All paddlers should be able to swim with a life jacket on, and be able to assist a swimmer with either a boat-based rescue or a rope toss from shore. These are essential skills. There are more advanced skills that can be helpful, such as wading, either singly or in groups, to rescue entrapped paddlers or pinned boats. Setting up mechanical systems to rescue people and/or equipment, learning how to swim in more difficult conditions or how to safely swim over a strainer can all be vital skills for the paddler to know. These skills (and more) should be learned in a class setting, taught by knowledgeable,

experienced, certified instructors. Paddlers would be well-served to seek out such classes and instructors and learn these skills. Your safety may depend on it.



Boat-Based Rescues

Often a self-rescue is the quickest and safest method for a swimmer to reach safety. However, a paddler can assist a swimmer in several ways.

The simplest method is to paddle over to the swimmer and instruct them to hold onto either the bow or stern of the paddler's boat. Towing and pushing a swimmer both work well, but determining which will work best in a given situation requires practice.

Towing or "bulldozing" an empty boat to shore can work well too, although you'll notice the boat will not follow directions very well. Both techniques require specialized equipment and advanced training. It can be hazardous, and is not recommended for beginners.

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