

## Open Ocean paddling requires more than boat-handling skills:

You must be prepared to help your paddling partners by:

- ◆ Doing deep water assisted rescues
- ◆ Rescuing a disabled paddler
- ◆ Towing a disabled or tired paddler

You also need to know how to:

- ◆ Navigate using tide tables, nautical charts and a compass
- ◆ Read channel markers and buoys
- ◆ Follow the nautical "rules of the road"
- ◆ Properly use a marine VHF radio
- ◆ Obtain marine weather forecasts and "read" the weather on the water.

## Perhaps most of all, you need to **develop good judgment** about

- ◆ When to paddle
- ◆ When to stay on the beach

Do not put yourself or those who would have to rescue you at risk!

## LET'S PLAN A TRIP!

- ◆ Watch the marine weather forecasts. The weather on the ocean can be quite different than land-based weather forecasts indicate. Storms far out to sea can set off swells that increase local surf conditions days later.
- ◆ Study the area, review the nautical charts, street and topographical maps, talk with "a local," ask around. Are there shoals? Tidal races? Standing waves that form during tide changes? Dumping surf? Areas known for rough water? Submerged rocks? Busy harbors or boat channels?
- ◆ What are your "bailout" options at different points along the route? Where will you have access to a road or house?
- ◆ Check with the Coast Guard for heightened security restrictions, especially in port areas, via the website ([www.uscg.mil](http://www.uscg.mil)) or VHF-FM channel 16.
- ◆ Check the tide table: When is high tide? Low tide? Will you be paddling against tidal currents?
- ◆ Prepare a "float plan" stating where you are leaving from, where you are going, and when you intend to return. Leave a copy with friends and phone them with any last minute changes in plans. (Telephone the friends when you return so they don't call for a search unnecessarily!)

## BE VISIBLE ON THE WATER

- ◆ The number one complaint from fishing boat captains is that they cannot see kayaks! Choose a boat color that is bright and highly visible. Add reflective tape.
- ◆ Put reflective tape on your paddle blades.
- ◆ Wear highly visible clothing, especially on your head. Attach reflective patches to your PFD.
- ◆ At dawn, dusk and night, paddle with extreme caution, out of the way of boat traffic. In addition to Coast Guard required signal and emergency lighting, states have differing rules for what lights are required - even on inland waters. Find out before you go!
- ◆ Remember: your low profile makes you invisible to radar. If caught in fog get close to shore, away from boat traffic and off the water ASAP!

## CHECKLIST - The "GO" – "NO GO" DECISION

Compare your skills to the worst case scenario:  
Can you and the rest of your group handle it?

- Go: Weather looks good. Everyone is healthy with all required equipment.
- No Go: Someone feels sick. You are late for the tide or daylight remaining. You forgot your sprayskirt. The wind is picking up. Thunderstorms are moving in. Any other unexpected adverse conditions?

## CHECKLIST - THE BASICS

- Kayak with secure flotation
- PFD with whistle attached
- Paddle
- Sprayskirt
- Paddlefloat
- Bilge pump and sponge
- Clothing suitable for the air and water conditions
- Sun protection: sunblock, especially on the lips, hat with a visor, and sunglasses - with a secure strap.
- Water bottle and food.

## CHECKLIST - ADDITIONAL FOR NIGHT PADDLING

- Flashlight
- Flares or strobe (Coast Guard approved!)
- Lighting to comply with the International - Inland Rules of the Road, Part C, Rule 25 and any state rules

## CHECKLIST - ADDITIONAL FOR OPEN OCEAN

- Float plan
- Spare paddle for every 3 paddlers in your group
- Marine VHF Radio (includes weather radio)
- Tow belt and cutting tool
- Navigation aids: road maps, topo maps and nautical charts of the area, tide tables
- Deck compass and a hand-held compass
- Shelter: tarp, bivy, emergency blanket
- Waterproof matches or lighter
- Boat repair kit
- Helmet for surfing or rock gardens
- A thermos of warm water to warm you and neoprene gloves
- I.D. with emergency contact information in your PFD pocket and in your kayak
- Extra clothing in dry bag, rain gear
- First aid kit
- Other?

The **GREATEST SINGLE DANGER** to sea kayakers is hypothermia: lowering of the body temperature. Even mild hypothermia can affect judgment, leading to poor decisions. Without prompt, **proper** treatment **hypothermia can kill**.

The average adult has a 50-50 chance of surviving a 50-yard swim in 50 degree water. You lose body heat 25 times faster in water than in air! Swimming increases heat loss.

Don't wear cotton. Cotton chills. Wear a wetsuit (drysuit if conditions warrant) and fabrics that wick water away from your body. Carry dry clothes and a windbreaker.

**The air warms up long before the water. New England's coastal waters ALWAYS demand respect, in SUMMER TOO!**

Hypothermia can be prevented. Learn how.  
See the hypothermia links at [www.nspn.org](http://www.nspn.org).

## PADDLING ETIQUETTE - *be a good neighbor and protect the marine environment.*

- ◆ At launch sites avoid blocking boat ramps. Park cars where they do not interfere with boat trailers.
- ◆ Use car-top boat launch sites when possible. Pay your share of launch & parking fees.
- ◆ When paddling through a marina, stay to one side rather than weaving between moored boats.
- ◆ Stay out of marked boat channels. Leave the deep water to power & sail boats. If you must cross, do so quickly at a 90 degree angle when the channel is clear, like crossing a street.
- ◆ Always yield the right of way to power & sail boats. Assume they cannot see you and act accordingly.
- ◆ Respect private property and protected wildlife habitat. Land only where permitted.
- ◆ Do not land at public or private swim beaches that have posted lifeguards. Check local rules.
- ◆ Observe wildlife, without disturbing it. Know & obey the legal rules on approaching marine mammals. Do not cause birds to take flight or seals to take to the water.
- ◆ Adhere to "Leave No Trace" (LNT) practices. Carry out all of your waste and pick up a bit of litter for proper disposal. Leave interesting shells, etc. for others to enjoy too. You can find LNT practices at [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org).

## WHAT TO WEAR

New England's coastal waters are ALWAYS cold enough to be dangerous. It is imperative that open ocean kayakers dress for the water temperature and exposure. The best way to be sure is to test your gear:

Put on your paddling clothes and get in the water - with friends, close to shore of course!

If you are not willing to swim 10 yards in the water you are paddling on, wearing the clothes you are paddling in . . .

### STOP AND THINK

*What will you do if you end up in the water?*

The average May water temperature in Boston harbor is 54 degrees. In July it is only 63! Dress accordingly.

## EMERGENCIES - be prepared!

- ◆ Carry and know how to use emergency signaling devices. From dusk to dawn you MUST carry a white light to shine at approaching boats and flares or an emergency strobe (Coast Guard approved).
- ◆ A marine VHF radio, properly used, is the best way to communicate on the water: you can reach nearby boats. Cell phones go out of range. The Coast Guard cannot triangulate on a cell phone to locate you!
- ◆ Learn and use the following standard signals:

### Distress (Emergency):

Wave one blade of your paddle vertically, high over head. If you lost your paddle, raise and lower both arms outstretched (same signal boaters use). Three whistle blasts is the universal distress signal but in wind people may not hear a whistle.

### I'm Okay:

Tap the top of your head with a hand, elbow bent (same signal divers use). Also, two short blasts on your whistle ("toot, toot").

### Safe on Shore:

Let people know your kayak has not washed up without you! Use a cockpit cover or place your paddle securely and visibly across the cockpit or deck if you leave your kayak unattended.

Be sure you are above high tide or tie your kayak securely!



The North Shore Paddlers Network is a not-for-profit, sea kayaking club founded in 1998 and centered in the North Shore area of Massachusetts, with members from Maine to Connecticut and beyond. NSPN is affiliated with the American Canoe Association.

**Membership materials are available on line.**

Visit our website [www.nspn.org](http://www.nspn.org) for a wealth of information, including gear lists, safety information, put-in locations and more! Feel free to search our archives and post questions on our message board.

DISCLAIMER: NSPN is providing this brochure as a public service. It is not and is not intended to be comprehensive regarding all possible hazards and risks or safe practices. We hope it will get you thinking and enthused about learning more.

You are responsible for your own safety.

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NSPN Guide to

## Sea Kayaking

### *Getting on the ocean . . .*

The Inuit hunted seals from these skinny little boats. You can learn to paddle one! Sea kayaking is a wonderful sport. You can

- ◆ Escape the crowds and visit small tranquil islands,
- ◆ Cruise through marshes watching birds
- ◆ Camp on Boston harbor or Maine islands
- ◆ Go fishing or diving
- ◆ Be happy when storms arrive because it means SURF!
- ◆ Go on an expedition to the Arctic wilderness or
- ◆ Enjoy countless other options.

The one constant is the need to be prepared for this on-water activity - there are inherent risks.

*You are responsible for your own safety!*

## BUILD ON THE BASICS

### You have the basics down:

- ◆ Launching and landing
- ◆ Forward, reverse and turning strokes
- ◆ You are comfortable with doing a wet exit & self rescue
- ◆ You can rescue someone else

### Now add more sophisticated boat handling skills:

- ◆ High and low brace strokes, to prevent capsizing
- ◆ Draw strokes, to move your boat laterally
- ◆ Sculling strokes for support
- ◆ Forward and reverse sweep strokes to turn
- ◆ Emergency stop
- ◆ Stern rudder

### Once you can perform those strokes on flat water, you are ready to try paddling:

- ◆ In waves, following seas, currents and eddies
- ◆ In wind, turning in all directions
- ◆ In surf zones, including launching & landing through surf

Always try out new skills or more challenging conditions in a class or with experienced paddlers to "spot" you.