

For flat water paddling in protected waters you will want to learn how to:

- ◆ Choose a kayak that fits you and the type of paddling you want to do. Many vendors have “demo days”. You can also rent kayaks for an hour, a day, or the season. Try before you buy.
- ◆ Properly adjust your personal flotation device (PFD) so it stays below your ears when you are in the water. Attach a whistle and always wear it on the water.
- ◆ Safely carry your kayak. (Let someone help you and lift with your legs! Most paddle sports injuries result from slipping while carrying boats.)
- ◆ Load your kayak onto your car and tie it securely.
- ◆ Get into and out of your kayak without tipping over, from the shore and from a low dock.
- ◆ Fasten and release your spray skirt. (Attaching a whiffle ball or carabiner to the release loop will make it easier to find and grab.)
- ◆ “Wet exit” your kayak after a capsize. (Although scary the first time, you will be amazed how easy it is.)
- ◆ “Self rescue”: get back in your boat all by yourself and keep paddling! And how to rescue others.
- ◆ Control your boat using the basic strokes: forward, reverse, and turning.

BE VISIBLE ON THE WATER

- ◆ The number one complaint from motor and sail boaters 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, and a brightly colored hat. 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!

BEFORE YOU LAUNCH CHECKLIST

- Leave a “float plan.” That just means: tell friends where you are going and when you plan to return. Make sure they are aware of any last-minute changes. (Telephone them when you return so they don’t send someone to search for you unnecessarily!)
- Check the weather forecast. Are there high winds? Thunderstorms moving in?
- Check with the Coast Guard for heightened security restrictions, especially in port areas, via the website (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?
- Do you have all your gear? Do you know how to use it?
 - Kayak with secure flotation
 - PFD with whistle attached
 - Paddle
 - Sprayskirt
 - Paddlefloat
 - Bilge pump and sponge
- Are you dressed for the air and water conditions?
- Do you have a dry set of clothes?
- Do you have protection from the sun? Sunblock, especially on the lips, a hat with a visor, and sunglasses - with a secure strap to hold them on.
- Bring along a water bottle and food.
- Don’t forget your camera!
- Other?

JUST IN CASE Learn and use these emergency 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 long, loud 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 *GREATEST SINGLE DANGER* - to 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. Wet cotton chills. Wear a wetsuit (drysuit if conditions warrant) and fabrics that wick water away from your body. Carry dry clothes & a windbreaker protected in double plastic bags or a dry bag.

The air warms up long before the water. New England’s coastal waters and large lakes ALWAYS demand respect, in SUMMER TOO!

Hypothermia can be prevented. Learn how.

See the hypothermia links at 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. Your kayak only needs 6 inches of water! 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 and obey the legal restrictions 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

WHEN THE OPEN OCEAN CALLS YOU . . .

Many people who start out with recreational kayaks get bitten by the paddling bug and can't resist the open ocean. Venturing along the open coast requires additional skills (handling waves, wind and currents), knowledge (navigation, nautical "rules of the road") and equipment (compass, charts, safety gear, marine radio, etc.)

- ◆ There are many excellent books on sea kayaking. Read them.
- ◆ Take more advanced classes.
- ◆ Seek out experienced paddling partners.
- ◆ Prepare yourself before entering more challenging waters.



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 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

Recreational Kayaking

Getting on the water . . .

Recreational kayaks are a great way to

- ◆ Enjoy a day on the water with family and friends
- ◆ Silently slip through marshes watching birds
- ◆ Relax and enjoy a sunset over the water or paddle quietly at dawn
- ◆ Go fishing in places bigger boats can't reach

As with all on-water activities, it is important to be prepared:

You are responsible for your own safety!

**ANY NEW SPORT IS MORE FUN
IF YOU GET STARTED RIGHT WITH
SOME BASIC SKILLS**

Take a few lessons.

Join a club and learn with others.

Do it with friends.

You will be amazed how quickly you learn to maneuver these elegant watercraft!