



Useful Contacts;

Maritime and Coastguard Agency MCA
dft.gov.uk/mca

Royal National Lifeboat Institution RNLI
0845 122 6999

rnli.org.uk/seasafety

Home Nation Associations

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SAFE SIT ON TOP PADDLING

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Sit on Top activity is one of the fastest growing areas of paddlesport. Its stability and ease of use have made it accessible to a wide range of people young and old. The ability to sit on rather than in removes the fear of the capsizes and the ability to travel some distance with minimal technique is both an advantage and disadvantage enabling the paddler to get places early on in their learning that maybe they should not.

While many participants of the sport undertake plenty of training and ensure they carry all the relevant safety equipment, there has been a significant increase in the number of people that don't have any previous experience on the water trying out the sport for the first time.

Membership of the British Canoe Union (BCU) through its association with federal bodies can provide significant benefits for people taking part in Sit on Top activities and gives access to an extensive network of qualified coaches, affiliated clubs and Approved Paddlesports Centres.

Specific training:

- Paddlepower & Paddlesport Start awards
- Bespoke training opportunities through clubs and with qualified coaches
- Foundation Safety and Rescue training
- White Water Safety and Rescue training
- 3 Star personal skills awards
- Introduction to Sea
- Introduction to Moving Water
- Introduction to Surf
- Coastal Navigation and Tidal Planning

Other benefits of membership include:

- Licenses to canoe on 5,000km of Britain's waterways
- Civil liability Insurance (up to £10 million)
- Canoe Focus magazine delivered every two months
- Great rates on boat insurance
- 10% discount at selected canoe and kayak retailers!
- 15% discount on all Cotswold Outdoor products

Paddling in sheltered waters is a great way to gain experience but it's easy to underestimate the potential hazards. Ideal locations are small lakes, canals, slow moving rivers (be aware of weirs) and sheltered harbours where there is little chance of being blown out to sea.

To ensure you, your family and friends stay safe while enjoying your paddling experience here are some basic top tips and equipment recommendations.

Always:

- Undertake suitable training in how to use all of your equipment (see contact details on reverse)
- Learn and practise techniques to get back onboard your kayak should you capsize
- Ensure you are a confident swimmer and can swim a minimum of 50m
- Ensure your kayak and equipment are well maintained and ready for the water – check the hatches and drain plugs are secure and watertight, paddle is in good condition, seat is firmly attached and all gear secured safely
- Wear a suitable approved personal flotation device (PFD)
- Ensure your PFD fits correctly and all the straps are done up securely; use crotch straps if fitted
- Wear suitable clothing for the season and conditions, such as a suitable wetsuit/drysuit and layered clothing; wear a hat and gloves in cold conditions
- Take a drink and snack with you (energy bars, dried fruit, nuts, chocolate)
- Paddle in a group where possible
- Tell someone back on land where you are going
- Ensure you carry a whistle attached by a suitable length of cord to your PFD.

Paddling on rivers:

- Access to lakes, canals and rivers is not a given right so check local access arrangements
- Rivers are graded from 1-6, 1 being very slow moving with few obstacles. White water training is essential over grade 1
- Check the water levels/gauges. Water levels can rise quickly increasing in volume and speed increasing the risk that existing hazards cause, e.g. overhanging trees (strainers), bridges, rocks and river debris
- Estuarine waters will be affected by tidal heights and strong winds. Check before you go.

If you are paddling beyond sheltered coastal waters:

- Check the weather and tidal information
- Be aware of wind strength, especially offshore winds (where the wind is blowing out to sea)
- Advise the local Coastguard of your planned journey. Sign up to HM Coastguard's Voluntary Safety Identification Scheme (CG66).

When surfing, paddlers:

- Should consider wearing a helmet
- Stay in control, uncontrolled kayaks can be harmful in the surf environment as they are heavy
- Keep away from other water users, especially swimmers
- Use beach zones where they are set up – look out for black and white chequered flags that indicate the area for hard surf craft
- Be aware of Rip currents.

Where appropriate the following recommended equipment should also be carried:

- A selection of flares including a day/night flare attached to the PFD
- A VHF radio (waterproof and charged)
- A fully charged mobile phone in a suitable dry bag (for back-up to the VHF)
- A paddle with a leash (attached to kayak)
- A split/spare paddle
- A pump/hand bailer
- A waterproof torch with working batteries
- A waterproof GPS
- A waterproof compass
- A waterproof watch
- A tow rope (be aware of its uses, ensure it is functional and keep within easy reach (onboard)
- An emergency knife attached to PFD
- A basic first aid kit
- Sunscreen/sunglasses/sun hat
- Spare clothes
- An exposure bag.

If you get in trouble:

- Call for help using your phone/VHF radio, flares or both
- If you fall in, remember to keep a tight grip on the paddle – on a sit-on-top kayak this should be leashed to your kayak
- Never attempt to swim to shore, always stay with your boat; by staying with the kayak you make a larger target for the search and rescue groups to see
- If you can only get your body partially out of the water you will significantly increase your survival time.