

USCG urges Increase in Paddlecraft Safety Awareness

*Special focus on Stand-up Paddleboards (SUP)

- 1) We urge the maritime community to join us in promoting greater paddlecraft safety awareness during the 2017 boating season in the Northeast, where paddlecraft fatalities have skyrocketed. **In 2016, the Northeast saw 28 paddler deaths, more than double the national average according to preliminary data.** Kayaks and Stand-up paddleboards (SUP) are the most common types of paddlecraft used in the maritime environment.
- 2) **SUP Carriage Requirement:** The U.S. Coast Guard has made a legal determination on the vessel status of paddleboards. It was determined that when a Stand-up Paddleboard (SUP) is beyond the narrow limits of a swimming, surfing, or bathing area, a paddleboard is considered a "vessel" under 46 U.S.C. § 2101, and is subject to USCG regulations, unless specifically exempted. Like any paddlecraft – e.g. Kayaks or canoes – an SUP operating outside a surfing or swimming area is subject to navigation rules, carriage requirements for personal flotation devices (PFDs), sound producing device, navigation lights and accident reporting. As with any paddlecraft, a whistle will suffice for a sound producing device. As with any rowboat, kayak or other paddlecraft, the operator of an SUP need only carry a flashlight that can be shined in enough time to avoid a collision. They are not required to have installed navigation lights. Further details/specifics on each of these requirements can be found at Title 33: Navigation and Navigable Waters, Part 175- Equipment Requirements, Subpart B- Personal Flotation Devices in the Code of the Federal Regulations. Also, the USCG strongly recommends that all paddlecraft be affixed with a "If found" sticker prior to operating on the waterways. These stickers may be attained from the USCG AUXILIARY or from your local USCG office. As for life jacket wear, check with your local state boating offices as rules can vary from state to state, particularly with requirements for children. Moreover, locally paddlers are required to wear PFDs (life jackets) from in Connecticut, Oct. 1-May 31, and in New York, Nov. 1-May 1. All mariners should be aware that most states require children under 12 to be in a life jacket at all times while on the water. You can also go to www.uscgboating.org and click on the Safety drop down for additional life jacket wear requirements.
- 3) Since stand-up paddleboarding is a relatively new activity but has been given a vessel classification and must meet federal carriage requirements per 33 CFR 175, there are still challenging issues for SUP with regard to life jacket or leash wear. So we highly recommend reviewing the first attached article from a recent (fall-winter 2016 issue) of USCG Proceedings Magazine Volume 73, Number 3 focused on Recreational Boating Safety (see digital copy at [http://digitaleditions.walsworthprintgroup.com/publication/?m=44587&l=1#{"iss](http://digitaleditions.walsworthprintgroup.com/publication/?m=44587&l=1#{)

[ue_id":372487,"page":0}\)](#) that provides a special focus on “Stand-up Paddleboard (SUP) Craft”. It is written by Mr. Christopher Stec, chief operating officer of the American Canoe Association(ACA - Canoe-Kayak-SUP-Raft-Rescue), the oldest nonprofit paddle sports organization in the United States, focusing on education, stewardship, recreation, and competition.

4) Education Available -

We encourage the entire recreational boating community to continue to partner to provide education to all groups associated with all paddlecraft, especially SUPs, that they may reduce the possibility of fatalities occurring while enjoying our nation’s waterways on a stand-up paddleboard. Paddlecraft safety is a critical concern and information is included in all USCG Auxiliary public education courses and numerous events are held to demonstrate the proper handling of canoes and kayaks. Find classes here: <http://a013.uscgaux.info/pe.htm>. See similar courses available through the U.S. Power Squadron at: <https://www.usps.org/index.php/boating-courses> .

5) Also, the First Coast Guard District public affairs office is seeking partnerships with local media to share safety information to Northeast paddlers. For interviews, stories, and access to Coast Guard crews and assets, members of the media are encouraged to contact (203) 468-4433 or (617) 223-8515.

6) Lastly, reporting incidents are critical to analysis and prevention. Please review the attached CT and NYS Boating Accident reporting guidelines, and the USCG Marine Casualty reporting guidelines. Usually, paddle craft incidents don’t rise to the level of a reportable marine casualty requiring a CG investigation. However, a paddle raft/commercial vessel accident is not outside the realm of possibilities, as was the case during last summer’s late afternoon August 30, 2016, a group of eight kayakers set off from the dock at West 44th Street in New York City for a guided tour along the Hudson River. The intended route was south along the waterfront of midtown Manhattan, then southwest down the river. As the tour passed the New York Waterways ferry piers at West 39th Street, a commercial passenger ferry backed out of its berth, then turned west to head toward New Jersey. The kayak tour guide attempted to signal the ferry captain by waving his arms, but the captain later told investigators that because of the glare of the setting sun he did not see the paddlers in time to avoid colliding with them. Three kayakers, including the guide, were injured in the collision—two of them seriously. The ferry captain alerted authorities and used his vessel and crew to help rescue the kayakers. New York Waterways did not learn until several hours later that all kayakers had been rescued and accounted for.