

American Canoe Association / Hawaii Island Paddlesports Assn. Safety Guidelines

"Be Prepared," advises the Boy Scout Motto. Sound advice for life and the key to enjoying a successful paddling day. You want to be prepared with the right clothing and equipment, the right physical conditioning, and the right mental attitude. Use intelligence before bravery.

Personal Flotation Device (PFD), A.K.A. "Life vest." US Coast Guard regulations require that each watercraft passenger at least carries a wearable PFD (Class III or V in flotation rating). The American Canoe Association requires that PFDs must be worn during all ACA sanctioned programs. The H.I.P.A. Variance allows for the paddler to use a qualified durable leash system to be tethered to the canoe in lieu of the PFD. This device is required during sanctioned events and highly suggested during training.

Brimmed Hat or Visor: Although rain is a paddler's friend, you will probably most enjoy venturing out on a clear, sunny day. Therefore, unless you're totally sun-proof, you'll want to protect your head and face from the sun's harmful rays. And don't forget the Sunscreen. UV rays are just as severe reflecting up from the water. Gloves; to

Sunglasses: Keep these handy for the same reason as your sun visor. They can also score big points in the coolness category. Don't forget the retainer strap.

Water Bottle: A hydrated paddler is a happy paddler. Bring some snacks or goo also.

First Aid Kit and Duct Tape: Keep a well-stocked repair kit for your body and boat in your vehicle. There are several varieties of ready-equipped first aid kits for various degrees of need. Clear package sealing tape is good for boat repair.

Once you are properly geared, being prepared goes beyond equipment and clothing. For many remote-paddling destinations, you are embarking on an expedition, not just a Disneyland ride. A day or afternoon of paddling can demand strenuous physical exertion. Start with shorter (time and distance) outings to build up your strength and stamina. As you refine your paddling skills too, you'll experience greater stroke efficiency.

Paddle with a partner; if you must paddle alone, venture no farther out from shore than you can comfortably swim (be honest with yourself).

And finally, double check your equipment before going out, paddle, iako, rudder, plugs and a quick eyeball check of your hull. Make this a habit.

Have fun and train hard.