

Small Craft Safety Talk

"When anxious, uneasy, and bad thoughts come, I go to the sea, and the sea drowns them out with its great wide sounds, cleanses me with its noise, and imposes a rhythm upon everything in me that is bewildered and confused."

Rainer Maria Rilke

Introduction:

Why are we talking about this?

Important reminders/review.

We get complacent.

As the season ends, more of us are on the water in small crafts.

We don't really think about it, but paddling is inherently unsafe.

Cold. Windy. Unpredictable.

Shit DOES happen.

Discuss Multipliers

Aside from all your other goals...getting home is number one and often forgotten until the shit hits the fan.

We often know what to do and what is best, but we don't always do it.

You guys are adults. You get to decide what to do and what is the safest course of action. These are tools to help with that.

Questions to ask yourself:

Can you swim a mile? How about in lots of clothes, with a PFD, and holding a paddle?

What are my skill sets? Limitations? When should I turn around or not go out?

How do I prevent problems before they arise, and what do I do when things go sideways?

Me and my experience (s):

40-plus years paddling.

More miles on OC1 and Ski than OC6.

1000s and 1000s of miles.

Almost everything below has happened to me (or someone I know).

Issues for discussion:

Huli

Cramping/leg asleep (why this happens)/ Dehydration/bonking

Rudder cable breakage

Pedal break

Paddle break (OC1 and Ski)

Leash break

Catastrophic boat failure/Delamination/Separation from craft

Hypothermia (air temp plus water temp over 110 degrees or need a wetsuit)

Animals (seals, sea lions, whales, sharks, otters)

Boats and boat wakes; planes...yes, planes

Death

Clothing:

Booties (warmth and Rocks)

Layers

Polypropylene

Wool

Hat

No cotton

Bright colors

Keep core warm (sports bra, layered short sleeve over long, vest pfd)

Safety gear:

Life Jacket* (kinds, inspection, reasons for different kinds)

Leash*

Whistle/whistle attachment (important)

Phone/radio

Mirror

Water/food (goo, gel, bar)

Spare paddle (how to attach)

Rubber tubing

Spare rudder cable

Screwdriver/wrench/knife

Know hand signals for "I'm in trouble" and "I'm OK"

Buddy (discuss)

*mandatory

Float Plan:

A float plan is a document that contains an accurate outline of your water excursion, covering the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, and WHEN of your outing.

There are several key components to a float plan, including:

- **Full name(s)**
- **Mobile phone number(s):** be sure to fully charge your phone.
- **Marine radio (VHF) channel:** be sure to fully charge your radio.
- **Emergency contact(s):** name and mobile number
- **Itinerary:** The intended route, including any planned stops and the expected length of each leg of the trip:
 - The estimated departure and arrival times.
 - The estimated duration of the voyage.
 - The expected launch and destination locations.
- **Description:** type of small craft(s), color, and length; personal clothing description, especially colors.
- **Vehicle:** license plate number, model, and color.
- **Emergency:** Indicate how long to wait until your float plan guardians should notify the authorities; provide local and USCG authority contacts.

Choose two responsible adults to be the guardians of your float plan. Also, print it out and leave it on the dashboard of your vehicle.

If you deviate from your float plan, do so only for safety reasons. Know and respect your own limitations, experience level, and fitness.

Formal vs informal

Know the tide, weather, and wind

At the very least, someone should know where, when and who you are going with. They should know generally how long you are going to be out and should have a drop dead time (pun intended) as to when to start worrying/ when to start making calls. You can set a timer on your phone to remind you to call and what is expected of them if you don't call.

Know your limits...err on the side of caution. If in doubt, don't go out! Don't be swayed by peer pressure. Turn around if unsafe. (Marco in Hood, me at Sausalito race).

Inspection: (nothing lasts forever):

Rudder cables
Peddles
Seams
Paddle
Iako springs
PFD
RINSE YOUR GEAR!

Techniques:

Bracing (practice)
Huli recovery (practice)
Flying your ama! (practice)

What to do when shit goes south:

In most situations, stay with the boat unless you cannot:

It floats. It is visible/much easier to spot from above. It can keep you out of the water (50/50/50 rule). Ama floats (if hull is damaged and sinking can separate ama for flotation).

Huli:

Be calm. Assess the situation. All gear secure? Equipment intact?
Usually the thing that can start all the badness (multiplier).
Practice recovery (flat and windy).
Practice bracing.
Importance of being able to fly the ama (advanced paddling situations but really helpful otherwise).
Potential consequences: cold, fatiguing, can damage equipment, can put you in a bad location, precipitate more hulis.

Cramping/leg asleep/Dehydration/Bonking:

Be calm. Assess the situation.

Abdominal cramping usually due to dehydration or electrolyte issues. Usually occurs after extended paddling. Drink/eat. If safe take a break. Head home.

Muscle cramping can be due to dehydration or electrolyte issues. Alternatively, from poor technique, over gripping paddle, or fear. Head home.

Leg asleep is usually from leaning too far left. Practice bracing, practice flying ama. Discuss wedges and cutouts (usually a bad idea that leads to more problems).

Dehydration/Bonking: Usually distance related. Bring water and food. Drink and eat before you get thirsty and hungry.

Rudder cable/line break...different options depending on boat/cable system:

Be calm. Assess situation. Don PFD if prudent. Options: 1) Jam rubber between rudder and hull in neutral position (many of the newer boats have a spring that keeps it (mostly) in neutral). Paddle steer home (or to safety). Wind severely effects this setup. Can be VERY hard to paddle steer as rudder keeps you going in one direction. 2) Remove rudder (screwdriver/wrench). Much easier to paddle steer but does take practice. 3) If boat has exposed yoke, use external rudder cable (will demonstrate). Call for help (discuss). Multiplier.

Pedal break

Be Calm. Assess situation. Most of above can work. If spectra/dynema can tie to toe (take off bootie). Call for help (discuss).

Paddle Break:

Be Calm. Assess situation. Use spare. If no spare can use hands like prone paddle board (if you have your flip flops with you, put on hands). Call for help (discuss).

Leash break:

Usually noticed during a huli. Get to boat ASAP if can. If cannot...see separation from boat below.

Catastrophic Boat Failure/Delamination/Separation from Boat:

Be calm. Don PFD. Assess situation...wind direction, tide direction, closest land with tide and wind in consideration. Decide when/if to ditch paddle. Look/signal for help (whistle/mirror). Add layers. Swim slowly. Call for help (discuss).

How to assist if you are with someone who has issues (Discussion)

General Recommendations:

PFD and leash ALWAYS.

At the very least, let someone know you are going and let them know when you are back.

Be in shape.

Err on the side of caution.

Practice safety and techniques.

SWIM! (awesome cross-training, great way to get extension, can save your life).

Respect the water.

Open Discussion re other issues/Questions

Next steps:

Huli recovery drills

Ama flying clinic