

# Safety Afloat

Safety Afloat has been developed to promote boating and boating safety and to set standards for safe unit activity afloat. **Before a BSA group may engage in an excursion, expedition, or trip on the water (canoe, raft, sailboat, motorboat, rowboat, tube, or other craft), adult leaders for such activity must complete Safety Afloat Training, No. 34159A, have a commitment card, No. 34242A, with them, and be dedicated to full compliance with all nine points of Safety Afloat**



## Who Can Instruct Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat Training?

Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat training can be given by any person authorized by the council, including a BSA Aquatics resource person, a unit leader with aquatics skill, or any other person with aquatics knowledge or experience whom the local council has approved.

## The nine defenses of Safety Afloat are:

### 1. Qualified Supervision

All activity afloat must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult age 21 or older who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the children in his or her care, who is experienced and qualified in the particular watercraft skills and equipment involved in the activity, and who is committed to compliance with the nine points of BSA Safety Afloat. One such supervisor is required for each 10 people, with a minimum of two adults for any one group. At least one supervisor must be age 21 or older, and the remaining supervisors must be age 18 or older. All supervisors must complete BSA Safety Afloat and Safe Swim Defense training and rescue training for the type of watercraft to be used in the activity, and at least one must be trained in CPR. It is strongly recommended that all units have at least one adult or older youth member currently trained as a BSA Lifeguard to assist in the planning and conducting of all activity afloat.

*For Cub Scouts:* The ratio of adult supervisors to participants is one to five.

### 2. Physical Fitness

**All persons must present evidence of fitness assured by a complete health history from physician, parent, or legal guardian.** The adult supervisor should adjust all supervision, discipline, and protection to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. In the event of any significant health conditions, the adult leader should require proof of an examination by a physician.

Those with physical disabilities can enjoy and benefit from aquatics if the disabilities are known and necessary precautions taken.

### 3. Swimming Ability

**A person who has not been classified as a "swimmer" may ride as a passenger in a rowboat or motorboat with an adult "swimmer" or in a canoe, raft, or sailboat with an adult**

certified as a lifeguard or a lifesaver by a recognized agency. In all other circumstances, the person must be a swimmer to participate in an activity afloat. "Swimmers" must pass this test:

**Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, and begin swimming. Swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be swum continuously and include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating.**

***This qualification test should be renewed annually.***

#### **4. Personal Flotation Equipment**

Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be worn by all persons engaged in activity on the open water (rowing, canoeing, sailing, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, kayaking, and surfboarding). Type II and III PFDs are recommended.

#### **5. Buddy System**

All activity afloat must adhere to the principles of the buddy system. The buddy system assures that for every person involved in aquatics activity, at least one other person is always aware of his or her situation and prepared to lend assistance immediately when needed. Not only does every individual have a buddy, but every craft should have a "buddy boat" when on the water.

#### **6. Skill Proficiency**

All participants in activity afloat must be trained and experienced in watercraft handling skills, safety, and emergency procedures. (a) For unit activity on white water, all participants must complete special training by a BSA Aquatics Instructor or qualified whitewater specialist. (b) Powerboat operators must be able to meet requirements for the Motorboating merit badge or equivalent. (c) Except for whitewater and powerboat operation as noted above, either a minimum of three hours' training and supervised practice or meeting requirements for "basic handling tests" is required for all float trips or open-water excursions using unpowered craft.

***For Cub Scouts:*** Canoeing and rafting for Cub Scouts (including Webelos Scouts) is to be limited to council/district events on flat water ponds or controlled lake areas free of powerboats and sailboats. Prior to recreational canoeing, Cub Scouts are to be instructed in basic handling skills and safety practices.

#### **7. Planning**

- **Float Plan.** Know exactly where the unit will put in, where the unit will pull out, and precisely what course will be followed. Determine all stopover points in advance. Estimate travel time with ample margins to avoid traveling under time pressures. Obtain accurate and current maps and information on the waterway to be traveled, and discuss the course with others who have made the trip under similar seasonal conditions. (Preferably, an adult member of the group should run the course before the unit trip.)
- **Local Rules.** Determine which state and local laws or regulations are applicable. If private

property is to be used or crossed, obtain written permission from the owners. All such rules must be strictly observed.

- **Notification.** The float plan must be filed with the parents of participants and a member of the unit committee. For any activity using canoes on running water, the float plan must be filed with the local council service center. Notify appropriate authorities, such as Coast Guard, state police, or park personnel, when their jurisdiction is involved. When the unit returns from this activity, persons given the float plan should be so advised.
- **Weather.** Check the weather forecast just before setting out, know and understand the seasonal weather pattern for the region, and keep an alert "weather eye." Imminent rough weather should bring all ashore immediately.
- **Contingencies.** Planning must anticipate possible emergencies or other circumstances that could force a change in the original plan. Identify and consider all such circumstances in advance so that appropriate contingency plans can be developed.

**For Cub Scouts: Cub Scout canoeing and rafting does not include "trips" or "expeditions" and is not to be conducted on running water (i.e., rivers or streams);** therefore, some procedures are inapplicable. Suitable weather requires clear skies, no appreciable wind, and warm air and water.

### **8. Equipment**

All equipment must be suited to the craft, to the water conditions, and to the individual; must be in good repair; and must satisfy all state and U.S. Coast Guard requirements. To the extent possible, carry spare equipment. On long trips or when spare equipment is not available, carry repair materials. Have appropriate rescue equipment available for immediate use.

### **9. Discipline**

All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe unit activity afloat. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing, and should be reviewed for all participants at the water's edge just before the activity begins. When Scouts know and understand the reasons for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with the fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.

**Note: For cruising vessels (excluding rowboats, canoes, kayaks, and rafts, but including sailboats and powerboats longer than 20 feet) used in adult-supervised unit activities by a chartered Venturing crew or Sea Scout ship specializing in watercraft operations or used in adult-supervised program activity in connection with any high-adventure program or other activity under the direct control of the National Council, the standards and procedures in a forthcoming Sea Scout manual may be substituted for the "Safety Afloat" standards.**

## **Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)**

**Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be worn by all persons engaged in activity on the open water (rowing, canoeing, sailing, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, and kayaking).**

**Only U.S. Coast Guard-approved equipment (types I, II, or III) is acceptable for use in Scouting aquatics.** Ski belts are not acceptable. Scouts and unit leaders should learn which type is appropriate for each specific circumstance and how to wear and check for proper fit.

## Waterskiing

Safe waterskiing starts with safe equipment; a thorough knowledge of techniques; competent an efficient, careful towboat operator; and a conscientious observer. A life jacket is a must for all waterskiers. Skis should be in good shape and free from sharp or protruding edges. The boat operator should be driving solely for the benefit, satisfaction, and safety of the skier. The boat and skier should stay away from docks, swimmers, boaters, people who are fishing, and other objects.

The Water-Skier's Safety Code and Boat Driver's Safety Code are found in the *Waterskiing* merit badge pamphlet. These are guidelines to be followed by all those involved in the sport of waterskiing.

**Reference: *Waterskiing* merit badge pamphlet**

## Boardsailing

The BSA boardsailing program has been developed to introduce Scout-age children to basic boardsailing skills, equipment, and safety precautions, to encourage development of skills that promote fitness and safe aquatics recreation, and to lay a skill and knowledge foundation for those who will later participate in more advanced and demanding activities on the water.

Any person recognized and certified as an instructor by Windsurfer International or the U.S. Board Sailing Association may serve as a counselor for the Boardsailing Award with the approval of the local council service center. Any person trained and experienced in boardsailing skills and safety may serve as a counselor for this award in a Scout summer camp program under the direction and supervision of a currently trained BSA Aquatics Instructor.

Instruction in recreational activity must be conducted according to the BSA guidelines for boardsailing. The Boardsailing Award is now available for inclusion in Scouting programs.

**Reference: Boardsailing BSA Award Application, No. 19-935**

## Whitewater Safety Code

The American Whitewater Affiliation (AWA) Safety Code includes ten recommendations for river safety:

- Be a competent swimmer.
- Wear a PFD.
- Keep your canoe or raft under control, always!
- Be aware of river hazards and avoid them.
- Boating alone is not recommended; preferred minimum is three to a craft.
- Be suitably equipped.
  - Wear shoes (tennis shoes or special canoeing shoes are best).
  - Tie your glasses on.
  - Carry a knife and waterproof matches (also compass and map).



- Don't wear bulky clothing that will waterlog.
- Wear a crash helmet where upsets are likely.
- Carry an extra paddle and canoe-repair tape.
- Open canoes should have bow and stern lines (painters) securely attached. Use at least 15 feet of 1/4- or 3/8-inh rope. Secure them to the canoe so that they are readily available but will not entangle feet and legs in case of a spill.
- Swim on your back in fast water, keeping your feet and legs downstream and high. Keep watching ahead.
- When you start to spill, keep the upstream gunwale high.
- If you do spill, hang on to your canoe and get to the upstream end. (Note: If you are heading into rough rapids and quick rescue is not expected, or if water is numbing cold, then swim for shore or a rock where you can climb out of the water.)
- When you are with a group:
  - Organize the group to even out canoeing ability
  - Keep the group compact for mutual support.
  - Don't crowd rapids! Let each canoe complete the run before the next canoe enters.
  - Each canoe is responsible for the canoe immediately behind it.