



BSA groups shall use *Safety Afloat* for all boating activities. Adult leaders supervising activities afloat must have completed *Safety Afloat* training within the previous two years. Cub Scout activities afloat are limited to council or district events which do not include moving water or float trips (expeditions).

Safety Afloat standards apply to the use of canoes, kayaks, rowboats, rafts, floating tubes, sailboats, motorboats, including waterskiing and other small craft, but do not apply to transportation on large commercial vessels such as ferries and cruise ships. Parasailing (soaring airborne in a parachute while being towed behind a motor boat), kitesurfing (using a wakeboard towed by a kite), and recreational use of personal watercraft (small, motorized watercraft propelled by water jets) are not authorized BSA activities.

Safety Afloat training may be obtained from the BSA online learning center at www.olc.scouting.org, at council summer camps, and at other council and district training events. Confirmation of training is required on local and national tour permits for trips that involve boating. Additional guidance on appropriate skill levels and training resources is provided in *Aquatics Supervision*, soon to be available from council service centers.

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 those in his or her care, and who is trained in and committed to compliance with the nine points of BSA Safety Afloat.

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 conduct of all activities afloat.

PERSONAL HEALTH REVIEW

A complete health history is required of all participants as evidence of fitness for boating activities. Forms for minors must be signed by a parent or legal guardian.

Participants should be asked to relate any recent incidents of illness or injury just prior to the activity. Supervision and protection should be adjusted to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. For significant health conditions, the adult supervisor should require an examination by a physician and consult with the parent, guardian, or caregiver for appropriate precautions.

SWIMMING ABILITY

Operation of any boat on a float trip is limited to youth and adults who have completed the BSA swimmer classification test. Swimmers must complete the following test, which should be administered annually:

Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth. Level off and 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.

For activity afloat, those not classified as a *swimmer* are limited to multi-person craft during outings or float trips on calm water with little likelihood of capsizing or falling overboard. They may operate a fixed-seat rowboat or pedal boat accompanied by a buddy who is a *swimmer*. They may ride in a canoe or other paddle craft with an adult *swimmer* skilled in that craft as a buddy. They may ride as part of a group on a motorboat or sailboat operated by a skilled adult.

PERSONAL FLOTATION EQUIPMENT

Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be worn by all persons engaged in boating activity (rowing, canoeing, sailing, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, and kayaking). Type III PFDs are recommended for general recreational use.

For vessels over 20 feet in length, PFDs need not be worn when participants are below deck, or on deck when the qualified supervisor aboard determines it is prudent to abide by less restrictive state and federal regulations concerning the use and storage of PFDs, for example, when a cruising vessel with safety rails is at anchor. All participants not classified as swimmers must wear a PFD when on deck underway.

PFDs need not be worn when an activity falls under Safe Swim Defense guidelines, for example, when an inflated raft is used in a pool or when snorkeling from an anchored craft.

BUDDY SYSTEM

All participants in an activity afloat are paired as buddies who are always aware of each other's situation and prepared to sound an alarm and lend assistance immediately when needed. When several craft are used on a float trip, each boat on the water should have a "buddy boat."

All buddy pairs must be accounted for at regular intervals during the activity and checked off in the water by the qualified supervisor at the conclusion of the activity. Buddies either ride in the same boat or stay near one another in single-person craft.

SKILL PROFICIENCY

Everyone in an activity afloat must have sufficient knowledge and skill to participate safely. Passengers should know how their movement affects boat stability and have a basic understanding of self-rescue. Boat operators must meet government requirements, be able to maintain control of their craft, know how changes in the environment influence that control, and only undertake activities within personal and group capabilities.

- Content of training exercises should be appropriate for the age, size, and experience of the participants, and should cover basic skills on calm water of limited extent before proceeding to advanced skills involving current, waves, high winds, or extended distance. At a minimum, instructors for canoes and kayaks should be able to demonstrate the handling and rescue skills required for *BSA Paddle Craft Safety*. All instructors must have a least one assistant who can recognize and respond appropriately if the instructor's safety is compromised.
- Anyone engaged in recreational boating using human-powered craft on flat-water ponds or controlled lake areas free of conflicting activities should be instructed in basic safety procedures prior to launch, and allowed to proceed once they have demonstrated the ability to control the boat adequately to return to shore at will.
- For recreational sailing, at least one person aboard should be able to demonstrate basic sailing proficiency (tacking, reaching, and running) sufficient to return the boat to the launch point. Extended cruising on a large sailboat requires either a professional captain or an adult with sufficient experience to qualify as a bareboat skipper.
- Motorboats may be operated by youth, subject to state requirements, only when accompanied in the boat by an experienced leader or camp staff member who meets state requirements for motorboat operation. Extended cruising on a large power boat requires either a professional captain or an adult with similar qualifications.
- Before a unit using human-powered craft controlled by youth embarks on a float trip or excursion that covers an extended distance or lasts longer than four hours, each participant should receive either a minimum of three hours training and supervised practice or demonstrate proficiency in maneuvering the craft effectively over a 100-yard course and recovering from a capsized.
- Unit trips on whitewater above Class II must be done with either a professional guide in each craft or after all participants have received American Canoe Association or equivalent training for the class of water and type of craft involved.

PLANNING

Proper planning is necessary to ensure a safe, enjoyable exercise afloat. All plans should include a scheduled itinerary, notification of appropriate parties, communication arrangements, contingencies in case of foul weather or equipment failure, and emergency response options.

- **Preparation.** Any boating activity requires access to the proper equipment and transportation of gear and participants to the site. Determine what state and local regulations are applicable. Get permission to use or cross private property. Determine whether personal resources will be used or whether outfitters will supply equipment, food, and shuttle services. Lists of group and personal equipment and supplies must be compiled and checked. Even short trips require selecting a route, checking water levels, and determining alternative pull-out locations. Changes in water level, especially on moving water, may pose significant, variable safety concerns. Obtain current charts and information about the waterway and consult those who have traveled the route recently.
- **Float Plan.** Complete the preparation by writing a detailed itinerary, or float plan, noting put-in and pull-out locations and waypoints, along with the approximate time the group should arrive at each. Travel time should be estimated generously.
- **Notification.** File the float plan with parents, the local council office if traveling on running water, and local authorities if appropriate. Assign a member of the unit committee to alert authorities if pre-arranged check-ins are overdue. Make sure everyone is promptly notified when the trip is concluded.
- **Weather.** Check the weather forecast just before setting out, and keep an alert weather eye. Anticipate changes and bring all craft ashore when rough weather threatens. Wait at least 30 minutes before resuming activities after the last occurrence of thunder or lightning.
- **Contingencies.** Planning must identify possible emergencies and other circumstances that could force a change of plans. Develop alternative plans for each situation. Identify local emergency resources such as EMS systems, sheriff departments, or ranger stations. Check your primary communication system, and identify back-ups, such as the nearest residence to a campsite. Cell phones and radios may lose coverage, run out of power, or suffer water damage.

EQUIPMENT

All craft must be suitable for the activity, seaworthy, and be able to float if capsized. All craft and equipment must meet regulatory standards, be properly sized, and be in good repair. Spares, repair materials, and emergency gear must be carried as appropriate.

PFDs and paddles must be sized to the participants. Properly designed and fitted helmets must be worn when running rapids rated above Class II. Emergency equipment such as throw bags, signal devices, flashlights, heat sources, first aid kits, radios, and maps must be ready for use. Spare equipment, repair materials, extra food and water, and dry clothes should be appropriate for the activity. All gear should be stowed to prevent loss and water damage. For float trips with multiple craft, the number of craft should be sufficient to carry the party if a boat is disabled, and critical supplies should be divided among the craft.

DISCIPLINE

Rules are effective only when followed. All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe boating activities provided by *Safety Afloat* guidelines. Applicable rules should be discussed prior to the outing and reviewed for all participants near the boarding area just before the activity afloat begins.

People are more likely to follow directions when they know the reasons for rules and procedures. Consistent, impartially applied rules supported by skill and good judgment provide stepping-stones to a safe, enjoyable outing.

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