Safety Afloat

Introduction

- Scouts use Safety Afloat training for all boating activities.
- Supervising Adults must have completed Safety Afloat training within the previous two years.
- Safety Afloat standards apply to the use of canoes, kayaks, rowboats, rafts, floating tubes, sailboats, motorboats (including waterskiing), and other small craft,
- Parasailing (being towed airborne behind a boat using a parachute), kite surfing (using a wakeboard towed by a kite), and recreational use of personal watercraft (small sit-on-top motorboats propelled by water jets) are not authorized BSA activities.

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 wellbeing 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.
  - ✓ Must be skilled in the safe operation of the craft for the specific activity, knowledgeable in accident prevention, and prepared for emergency situations.
  - ✓ If the adult with Safety Afloat training lacks the necessary boat operating and safety skills, then he or she may serve as the supervisor only if assisted by other adults, camp staff personnel, or professional tour guides who have the appropriate skills
- Additional leadership is provided in ratios of one trained adult, staff member, or guide per 10 participants.
- At least one leader must be trained in first aid including CPR.

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 pullout 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 prearranged 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 incidence 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's departments, or ranger stations.
- Check your primary communication system, and identify backups, such as the nearest residence to a campsite.
- Cell phones and radios may lose coverage, run out of power, or suffer water damage.

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 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.

- 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.

    1. They may operate a fixed-seat rowboat or pedal boat accompanied by a buddy who is a swimmer.

    2. They may ride in a canoe or other paddle craft with an adult swimmer skilled in that craft as a buddy.

    3. They may ride as part of a group on a motorboat or sailboat operated by a skilled adult.

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 undertake activities only that are within their 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 Aquatics Supervision: 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 flatwater ponds or controlled lake areas free of conflicting activities should be instructed in basic safety procedures prior to launch, and allowed to proceed after 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Life Jackets

- Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets must be worn by all persons engaged in boating activity (rowing, canoeing, sailing, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, and kayaking).
- Type III life jackets are recommended for general recreational use.
- For vessels over 20 feet in length, life jackets need not be worn when participants are below deck or on deck when the qualified supervisor aboard the vessel determines that it is prudent to abide by less-restrictive state and federal regulations concerning the use and storage of life jackets
    - ✓ For example, when a cruising vessel with safety rails is at anchor.
    - ✓ All participants not classified as swimmers must wear a life jacket when on deck underway.
    - ✓ Life jackets 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.

Equipment

- All craft must be suitable for the activity, be seaworthy, and 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.
- Life jackets 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.

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 the water by the qualified supervisor at the conclusion of the activity.
- Buddies either ride in the same boat or stay near each other in single-person 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.