

The ABCs of Sea Kayaking Safety

KEEP IT SAFE **CASKA**



Always wear your lifejacket (PFD)

Be aware of your limits

Carry appropriate gear

Dress for immersion

Evaluate the risks

Chicago Area Sea Kayaking Association

For more paddling safety information see the CASKA Safety Center at:
<http://www.caska.org/safety.htm>

TIPS FOR PADDLING ON THE GREAT LAKES

Take an introductory lesson from a qualified instructor

You'll learn to paddle safely and efficiently and the basics of self-rescue and assisted rescue.

The ACA and BCU certify kayaking instructors.

Learn to read conditions and assess whether your skills match them

Check the marine forecast before paddling. (There's a link on the CASKA website.) Be especially careful about storms and offshore winds. If conditions are beyond your skill and comfort levels, don't go out.

File a detailed float plan with friends or family

Make sure a responsible person knows where you are paddling, when you are expected back, and when to call for help.

Paddle a seaworthy kayak

Seaworthy kayaks are designed to handle waves and wind. They have watertight bulkheads and perimeter deck lines. Paddlers wear spray skirts to keep water out of the cockpit. Recreational kayaks, which lack bulkheads and deck lines, are appropriate only for smaller bodies of water.

Bring appropriate gear and an extra paddle

Always bring along a paddle float and a bilge pump and know how to use them. You should have signaling devices (whistle, strobe, flashlight), communication devices (marine radio, cell phone in waterproof case) and navigation aids (compass, chart). Bring a repair kit for your boat (duct tape) and a first aid kit. Bring more water and food than you expect to need and a dry bag containing spare clothes. Carry an extra paddle. Check the CASKA website and blog for detailed information on what to bring along.

Be comfortable getting out of and back into your kayak

Practice "wet exits" and a variety of rescue techniques—assisted and self-rescue—so you can perform them quickly when you need them.

Dress for immersion

Cold shock and hypothermia are the leading cause of sea kayaking fatalities. Dress for the water, not the air temperature. When the lake is as warm as it gets (lower 70s), wear wicking materials (synthetics or light wool), not cotton, and bring a splash jacket or wind breaker in case you get chilled. In cooler conditions, wear neoprene. When the water gets too cold for a swim in neoprene, wear a dry suit or don't go out. Always bring extra layers of insulation and wind protection.

Always wear a PFD (life jacket)

Wear a PFD. PFDs save lives. In approximately half of all kayaking-related fatalities, the casualty was not wearing a PFD. Get a properly fitting PFD and fasten it securely.

Paddle with others when possible

There is safety in numbers. Join a local paddling club. (CASKA welcomes paddlers of all experience levels.) Discuss your skill levels, practice your techniques and your rescues together, and enjoy the Great Lakes knowing you'll return home safely with great stories to tell.