

# Safety Afloat

**1. Qualified Supervision** All activity afloat must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult over 21 years of age 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 ten people, with a minimum of two adults for any one group. All supervisors must complete BSA Safety Afloat and Safe Swim Defense training, and at least one must be certified in CPR. **(It is strongly recommended that all units have at least one adult or older youth member currently certified as a BSA Lifeguard to assist in the planning and conduct 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 handicaps can enjoy and benefit from aquatics if the handicaps 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 feet first into water over the head in depth, level of, 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, board sailing, 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 persons participating in unit activity afloat on the open water must be trained and practiced in craft handling skills, safety, and emergency procedures.

**a.** All persons planning to participate in unit activity on white water must complete special training conducted by an Aquatics Instructor, BSA, or qualified equivalent.

**b.** Powerboat operators must complete state certification and be able to meet requirements for the Motor boating merit badge or equivalent (American Red Cross, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, or U.S. Power Squadron).

Except for white water and power-boat operation as noted above, a minimum of three hours training and supervised practice or fulfilling the requirements for basic handling tests is required for all 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

### a. 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.)

### b. 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.

### c. 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.

### d. 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.

### e. 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.

When Scouts know and understand the reason for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.