

Smart Start for Safe Paddling



Smart Gear

Always wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket while on the water. Pay attention to the size, weight capacity, and design of your boat and paddle. Carry essential safety gear such as a first aid kit, whistle, and cutting tool - and know how to use them! Don't forget to bring plenty of food, water, and dry clothes in a watertight bag or box.



Smart Plan

Make a plan before you paddle! Check the weather forecast especially for wind, storms, or temperature changes. Understand water conditions including tides, currents, and river levels. Identify potential hazards, including boat traffic, submerged obstacles, and cold water risks. Choose an appropriate paddling route and discuss back up plans.



Smart Decisions

Paddle in a group, never alone! Stay within your skill and comfort level and avoid unfamiliar waters without proper preparation. Learn waterway navigation rules including how to interact with other waterway users. Always file a float plan and give it to a trusted friend or family member.

Smart Skills

To build confidence on the water, learn and practice fundamental paddling strokes such as the forward stroke, sweep stroke, and draw stroke. Consistently practice proper boat entry, exit, and self-rescue techniques; also become confident in providing assisted rescues to other paddlers who need help. Find a certified instructor and take an on-water course!

