

SAFETY AT SEA

Kayaks, canoes, sailboards, inboards, outboards. Whatever the craft, whatever the size, boating is one of the more popular forms of recreation in Texas. Unfortunately, some people become so involved in having fun that they are unable to recognize the dangers around them.

While safety practices naturally vary with the type of craft used, there are some general rules to remember.

Wear a life jacket. Many non-swimmers wear a life jacket when they are in the water, but neglect to put one on while riding in a boat. Statistics show that people drown each year from falling into the water accidentally.

Don't ride in an overloaded boat. Too many people or too much equipment makes a boat ride lower in the water, where it can easily take on water and sink. This is especially true if the water gets a bit rough. Many inboard/outboard manufacturers put a plate on the boat's transom that shows the recommended weight capacity in number of persons as well as in number of pounds for people, motor, fuel and gear.

Use the right size motor. Too much power can damage your boat or even swamp it. The metal plate on the boat's transom shows the recommended maximum horsepower.

Don't ride on the bow of the boat. Those who ride in this dangerous location can be thrown into the water accidentally. Sitting on the sides of the boat is just as dangerous because any sudden lurch could toss you overboard.

Avoid sharp turns. These are hard both on equipment and on people. Take it easy and avoid accidents.

Don't lean out of the boat. You could lose your balance and fall into the water, or you could change the balance of the boat enough to make it turn over.

Don't drive a boat near swimmers. If you are old enough to drive a boat, you are old enough to realize that horseplay has no place behind the wheel. Buzzing swimmers, skiers or other boaters could result in tragedy. Use common sense and follow boating traffic rules.

Use lights when boating at night. The law requires that a boat be equipped with lights if it is used after dark. If you don't have lights, remember you will need to allow plenty of time to get back to the dock before sunset.

Stay with your boat. Capsizing is one of the most common boating accidents. Don't try to swim for shore unless there is good reason to do so. It is easier to spot a boat than a swimmer's head in the water.

Hopefully, you will be wearing a life jacket before a boat ever capsizes. If not, look for anything that will help keep you afloat — coolers, gas can, water containers. The three most important things to do are hold on, keep calm and wait for help to come.

Kayaking is one of the fastest growing sports in the state as Texans take advantage of the long coastline and some of the finest fishing found anywhere. Kayaking is remarkably safe, since the paddler must be closely attuned with both wind and water to move the craft.

The same is true for sailing. Remember to wear a life jacket. One of the most common sailing accidents involves being hit by the boom during an unexpected change of course. If you are knocked overboard, you may also be unconscious, making swimming skills useless.

Know how to right a capsized sailboat. All small boat sailors should practice capsizing the boat on purpose and righting it until help arrives. This is the rule even when the shore seems close by. There are too many instances of people setting off for shore and never being heard of again.

Always watch the weather. Accidents sometimes happen when boaters fail to notice changing weather or wait too long to act.

For more information, contact:

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