



# Paddling Event Best Management Practices

## Event Organization and Planning

The Oregon State Marine Board encourages and supports organizations seeking to introduce persons of all abilities to boating on Oregon's waterways. The agency is especially interested in supporting events designed to help veterans, persons with disabilities and children, learn the basic skills to be confident and safe on the water.

The following organization and planning steps are encouraged for any entity planning an on-water event using manually powered boats (paddlecraft such as kayaks, canoes, stand up paddleboards). If requesting partnership with, or participation from the Oregon State Marine Board, a designated Marine Board liaison is required to review this material with the event coordinator to ensure adequate preparation. If planning is not followed to the satisfaction of the Marine Board, the liaison may discourage the event from happening and withdraw Marine Board participation.

The first step upon hearing of a planned event is to determine if it has been, or needs to be, a [permitted marine event](#). Please contact the Waterways Program Coordinator, Randy Sigman, for assistance. He can be reached at 503-871-4941 or email [randy.sigman@boat.oregon.gov](mailto:randy.sigman@boat.oregon.gov). The event process will inform local law enforcement and waterway managers about the event's date and time and any unusual needs it presents. This is the point as well where the Marine Board would consider if additional assistance were available and appropriate.

The event must have a Lead Event Coordinator who will interface directly with the Marine Board liaison to ensure each step is addressed: key personnel are clearly identified, trained and capable of their duties, has the authority to stop the event on demand if a critical safety concern is identified, or an unforeseen event occurs.

Designate a Safety Officer with training, experience, capability, and independence to act immediately in the event of a safety concern. For example, if a storm is unexpectedly creating strong currents, the Safety Officer must be ready to act decisively and get people to shore safely and without delay. The safety officer should be asked prior to people entering the water if they are comfortable with conditions, equipment, and the overall situation. In the event of an adverse situation, the Safety Officer should act, but should also evaluate the incident and make recommendations to avoid similar incidents in the future. Ideally, this is a delegated position separate from the Lead Event Coordinator.

## Prior to the event

The Lead Event Coordinator will develop a thorough safety plan and event outline. The safety plan will include the following information:

1. Staffing: Number of individuals, their capabilities, defined roles, etc. of people assisting in the event. This does not include any personal caregivers assisting individuals in the event.
2. Suitable infrastructure to support the event (transportation, food, water, communications, etc.). Identify boating facilities for launching and retrieving. Ensure adequate parking is available for single cars, staging areas for paddlecraft to set up, and restroom availability.



3. Number of participants and helpers, plus all names, cell phones and contact information for each person.
4. Expected or known skills and abilities of the participants and their experience and comfort around the water.
5. An overview of the site or location of the event. This should include an analysis of the complexity of the location – white water, currents, accessibility, visibility, winds, etc., and if that is appropriate to the skill level and capabilities of the event participants.
6. A listing of local emergency services with their contact numbers.
7. A copy of a [Marine Event Permit](#), park permits or other required approvals (state or federal).
8. Ensure all participants meet the [state carriage \(equipment\) requirements](#) (properly fitting life jackets, whistle, and flashlight). Participants must also carry a [Waterway Access Permit](#).

Each participation should meet Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC) and be able to perform the following:

1. Breathe independently (i.e., not require medical devices to sustain breathing).
2. Independently maintain sealed airway passages while under water.
3. Independently hold head upright without neck / head support.
4. Manage personal care independently or with assistance of a companion.
5. Manage personal mobility independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance.
6. Follow instructions and effectively communicate independently or with assistance of a companion.
7. Independently turn from face-down to face-up and remain floating face up while wearing a properly fitted life jacket.\*
8. Get in / out of a paddlecraft independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance.\*
9. Independently get out and from under a capsized paddlecraft.\*
10. Re-enter the paddlecraft following deep water capsize independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance.\*
11. Maintain a safe body position while attempting skills, activities and rescues and can recognize and identify to others when such efforts would be unsafe given your personal situation.\*

*\* To participate in adaptive programs, participants must acknowledge only the first six EEC listed above.*

## At the Event

The Lead Event Coordinator must ensure that participants are physically and emotionally prepared for the event. A set time for preparation is critical. Safety protocols must be explicitly stated to participants and their helpers. Here is an outline of activities and actions to take with the group in preparation for the on-water activity.

### On the Shore

- Behavioral guidelines
  - Set clear behavioral guidelines at the start of the event. Restate these guidelines as needed throughout the event. If persons cannot agree to follow these, excuse them from the event.
    - Wear life jackets always while on the water
    - Respect others, Respect the equipment
    - No hitting other people with paddles or sword fighting



- Outfit the participants
  - **PFD Fitting**
    - Size PFD to person, life jacket should be snug on person
    - If there is a strap for in between the legs, have parent connect it. DO NOT place hands in between the legs of a child, have parents fit the strap to child.
    - Should not be able to lift PFDs above lower ear lobes
    - Advise to not loosen or take off PFD while on the boat
  - **Sizing Paddle and Correct Use of the Paddle**
    - Size paddles to each person and show the correct position to hold
- Land & water etiquette:
  - Stay clear of anglers on the water
  - Keep boats clear of launch ramps (proper way to stage boats)
- Launching/landing from land or docks:
  - Assist participants to load and unload at launch ramp
  - Entry/Exit – 3-points of contact
  - Boat Stability - “relax, salsa hips”
  - Sitting Position – upright position, no laid-back position or slouching
- Boating safety:
  - Leaning over gunwale/boat (don’t reach for things)
  - Never stand, keep center of gravity low
- Basic paddling:
  - Forward Stroke – move boat forward
  - Reverse Stroke – move boat backwards
  - Sweep Stroke – turn the boat
- Possible navigational hazards:
  - Waterway obstructions (trees and rocks)
  - Other boats that may not see you (power or paddle)
  - Currents, shoals, winds, etc.
- The Paddling Environment (how to respond):
  - Wind
  - Waves
  - Weather
  - Water (cold water)
  - Warm up participants to reduce risk of injury
    - Basic stretching and moving. If a helper is present, advise them to conduct warmup appropriate to person’s physical capabilities.

### On the Water

- Always have a lead, lag, and safety boats when on the water. Depending on the number of participants, the following should be maintained for participants of average skill and ability levels:
  - Group of 5 participants; one lead, one lag, plus one safety boat
  - Group of 10 participants; one lead, one lag, plus 1-2 safety boats
  - Group of 20 participants; two leads, one lag, plus 2-3 safety boats
  - Additional safety boats or on-water resources, such as a raft with additional capacity,



may be necessary to address the needs of persons with certain disabilities.

- Leads, lags and safety boats must have paddling experience above novice and experience in self-rescuing and rescuing others. All Individuals in these roles should be wearing bright vest or shirts to identify themselves as leads, lags, and safety boats. The leads, lags, and safety boat personnel should also know their ability:
  - Personal ability
  - Swimming ability
  - Fitness and conditioning
  - Safe paddle and boat handling
  - Safety and rescue experience

**Ensure that each participant, helper, and staff is appropriately outfitted. Here’s a basic list:**

<b>Participant Equipment</b>	<b>Lead, Lag and Safety Boats Equipment</b>
<b>Water bottle (filled)</b>	<b>*In addition to Participant Equipment</b>
<b>Sunscreen</b>	<b>Radio/phone (waterproof)</b>
<b>Towel</b>	<b>Rescue rope/webbing</b>
<b>Hat, sunglasses</b>	<b>Flashlight</b>
<b>Snacks or lunch</b>	<b>Bailing pump/bucket</b>
<b>Shoes that can get wet, no open toe shoes</b>	<b>Extra clothes</b>
<b>Casual clothes/extra layers on water/dry in car</b>	<b>Dry bag</b>
<b>One whistle per boat</b>	

## Post Event Review

The event isn’t over when people get to the shore. Spend time debriefing and talking to all about how it went. All events will have challenges that arise unexpectedly. This is important information to collect and include in future events.

- Provide opportunity for participants, helpers, and staff to evaluate the event. Encourage honest feedback.
- Check with everyone for any injuries or potential injuries that may have occurred during the event.
- Inspect all watercraft to ensure they are in working order and not damaged. Ask participants if the equipment worked as expected.
- Collect all loaner items, such as life jackets, water bottles, etc.
- Write a summary of the event to help plan for the next event.

## Legal Carriage Requirements for Paddlers

- Properly Fitted Life Jacket and approved for your activity – learn more about life jackets [here](#).
- Waterway Access Permit – visit [here](#) for requirement details and how to purchase.
- Sound Signaling Device (whistle)
- All-Around White Light/Flashlight (in fog or darkness)

## Paddle Sports Safety Course

- Take the FREE online Paddle Sports Safety Course [here](#).