

# Safety Afloat

The BSA Safety Afloat standards were developed to promote boating and boating safety and to set standards for a safe activity afloat. They apply to all boating activities. Every Scout should study and understand the nine points of the Safety Afloat plan.

## Qualified Supervision

All activity afloat must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult age 21 or older 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 adult supervisor is required for each ten people, with a minimum of two adults for any one group. At least one supervisor must be age 21 or older, and the remaining supervisors must be age 18 or older. All adult supervisors must complete Safety Afloat and Safe Swim Defense training and rescue training for the type of watercraft to be used in the activity, 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 conducting of all activity afloat.

## Physical Fitness

All persons must present evidence of fitness by a complete health history from a physician, parent, or legal guardian. Adjust all supervision, discipline, and protection to anticipate any risks associated with individual health conditions. In the event of any significant health conditions, a medical evaluation by a physician should be required by the adult leader.

## 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 who is 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 feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, 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 completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating. This qualification test should be renewed annually.

## 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, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, kayaking, and surfboarding). Type II and III PFDs are recommended.

## Buddy System

All activity afloat necessitates using the buddy system. Not only does every individual have a buddy, but every craft should have a "buddy boat" when on the water.

## **Skill Proficiency**

All participants in activity afloat must be trained and experienced in watercraft-handling skills, safety, and emergency procedures.

- (a) For unit activity on white water, all participants must complete special training by a BSA Aquatics Instructor or qualified whitewater specialist.
- (b) Powerboat operators must be able to meet requirements for the Motorboating merit badge or equivalent.
- (c) Except for whitewater and powerboat operation as noted above, either a minimum of three hours of training and supervised practice or meeting the requirements for "basic handling tests" is required for all float trips or open-water excursions using unpowered craft.

## **Planning**

### **Float Plan**

Obtain current maps and information about the waterway to be traveled. Know exactly where the unit will "put in" and "pull out" and what course will be followed. Travel time should be estimated generously. Review the plan with others who have traveled the course recently.

### **Local Rules**

Determine which state and local regulations are applicable, and follow them. Get written permission to use or cross private property.

### **Notification**

File the float plan with parents of participants and a member of the unit committee. File the float plan with the local council service center when traveling on running water. Check in with all those who should be notified when returning.

### **Weather**

Check the weather forecast just before setting out, and keep an alert weather eye. Bring all craft ashore when rough weather threatens.

### **Contingencies**

Planning must identify possible emergencies and other circumstances that could force a change of plans. Appropriate alternative plans must be developed for each.

## **Equipment**

All equipment must be suited to the craft, to water conditions, and to the individual; must be in good repair; and must satisfy all state and federal requirements. Spare equipment or repair materials must be carried. Appropriate rescue equipment must be available for immediate use.

## **Discipline**

All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe unit activity afloat. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing, and should

be reviewed for all participants at the water's edge just before the activity begins. When Scouts know and understand the reasons for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with the fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.