

Attention Kayaker's

Did you know you're a real boat?

By Wayne Spivak, ADSO-CS 1SR
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

One of the fast growing markets in the boating industry today is that of the Kayaking. There are approximately 280 million Americans, and according to Inc. Magazine, only 30,000 kayaks were sold in 1993. In 1996, an estimated 40,000 kayaks were sold. The National Recreation and Park Association in a recent report stated that "A recent survey by the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America indicated that recreational kayaking almost doubled in participation from 1995 to 2000 with over 5.1 million current participants (Jenkins, 2001)."

That's some jump! And the sad part is the majority of those participating don't really know their little kayak is a vessel, which is required to conform to Federal, State and local laws. Here are some factoids that hopefully will drive home this point:

In the year 2000, the United States Coast Guard Office for Boating Safety reported 104 deaths from canoeing and /or kayaking, 93 from drowning. Of all boating fatalities, from all types of boats, 84% of those who died never took a boating course. In 1999, 84 people died in canoeing/kayaking accidents, all but 4 died from drowning. 90% of all boating fatalities were incurred by those who did not have a boating safety course.

While the Coast Guard is reporting overall a decline in boating fatalities (each year since 1997), it is the non-traditional boater who is gaining in percentage, where accidents and fatalities come into play. It is the kayaker and the canoeist that don't realize that they, like their power boating and sailing brethren, need to take a safe boating course.

Education

Kayakers, whether on a lake or river, in the bays or out on the open ocean need to understand the Rules of the Road, safety equipment, and believe it or not, navigation. Ever been out on the water, and all of a sudden a cold front comes sweeping in? Depending on the season, and the day, one of two life threatening occurrences could happen.

If a fog rolls in, then not only will your visibility diminish greatly, but the chances of you being seen go down even more. If you're an active kayaker, you already know that your low profile makes you an easy target for the lackadaisical power boater. Did you know that Federal Law requires all boaters to have an active lookout?

If fog doesn't roll in, then maybe the thunderstorms will. Thunderstorms can bring heavy rains, rough seas, high winds, and hail. By the way, we failed to mention lightning,

thunder and again diminished visibility. What would you do if you got stuck in a storm or for that matter a heavy fog?

The Coast Guard Auxiliary can help you here. We offer a myriad of boating courses that will teach you all you need to know to begin a safe boating season and career. An educated boater, and as a kayaker or canoeist, you are a boater, is a safer boater. The statistics don't lie.

Safety

What equipment is required to be aboard your kayak? If you said none, you'd be wrong, and possibly dead wrong! Did you know that the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary provides Vessel Safety Checks (VSC) for all type of waterborne vessels! From power boats to jet skis, rowboats to kayaks, from inflatable boats to pontoon planes, the Auxiliary will check your boat to make sure you have the required safety equipment aboard.

Do you wear a PFD (personal flotation device, what we used to call a life jacket)? In 2000, 70% of those who died by drowning were NOT WEARING a PFD. Seventy percent, that's quite a figure. That means 65 people may have survived their kayaking accident if they were wearing a PFD. In 1999, of the 517 people who died from drowning in boating accidents, 88% were not wearing a PFD. Makes you think, doesn't it?

Do you know the proper way to wear your PFD, and do you carry the proper optional equipment? Again, our Vessel Examiner can inform you of what you need to make your hobby as safe as possible. Take the time, it doesn't take long, and a VSC is not a law enforcement activity.

The only people who know whether or not you failed your Vessel Safety Check are you and the Vessel Examiner. Should you pass; the Vessel Examiner will place a VSC decal, showing you have all federal, state and local mandated equipment on your kayak or canoe.

The USCG Auxiliary is concerned with all Recreational Boating Safety issues, and believe it or not, kayak's and canoe's are real boats too!

You can find your nearest USCG Auxiliary Flotilla by calling your local Coast Guard office, or on the web at <http://www.cgaux.org>.