

Shared Waterways

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It is critical that you have a good working knowledge of the Navigation Rules before venturing out into a shared waterway. You need to know your responsibilities including the Steering and Sailing Rules, Conduct of Vessels in Sight of One Another, and Conduct of Vessels in Restricted Visibility. You also need to recognize the nautical lights and shapes and understand the sound and light signals that may be encountered in order to take appropriate actions to prevent collisions. It is also critical that you are able to communicate with all other vessels. If unsure of another vessel's intentions you need the ability to contact the other vessel on the radio in order to indicate their location and ask such questions as "Do you see me?" and "What are your intentions?". For more information on navigation rules and maritime communications please visit the [USCG Navigation Center Website](#) .

There are many safety topics important to paddlesport enthusiasts. Depending upon where you plan to paddle, the required skill sets may be minimal or they can be highly technical in nature. Persons new to paddlesports will benefit from taking a paddlesports safety course and the knowledge gained will increase their enjoyment on the water. An example of a free online course is located at [boaterexam.com](#). Training is also available from the [American Canoe Association](#) (ACA) and the [United States Coast Guard Auxiliary](#).

The Coast Guard strongly recommends that all paddlesport enthusiasts participate in boating safety education as well as taking paddlecraft specific skills training. Additionally, the following best practices should be considered every time before going out on the water:

- Always wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket
- Make yourself be seen (bright / contrasting clothing)
- Carry a sound producing device such as a whistle
- Carry a DCS-VHF radio
- Know your paddling limits
- Know the area where you will be operating
- Avoid paddling in main channels of busy waterways when possible
- Dress appropriately for the water temperature and forecasted weather
- Don't paddle alone
- Tell a friend where you are going and when you will return - file a float plan.
- If you plan to be out after dark, you will be required to exhibit an all-round light or have a flashlight readily available
- Don't drink alcohol and operate a boat or paddlecraft.