

Safety guidelines for paddling

The Committee for Paddling Safety in Finland has given the following safety guidelines for paddling as proposed by the Finnish Canoe Federation (FCF) on 24 April 2002. The safety guidelines were redefined as proposed by the Finnish Canoeing Trainers on 9 November 2012.

1 Application

1.1 These guidelines are applied to organised paddling in clubs and businesses or otherwise in organised paddling. The scope of application includes rental services, touring, training, tourism and other similar services. Sections 2, 3 and 4.1 are also applied in other than organised paddling.

In these guidelines paddling means a canoe or a kayak and the combination of these with equipment, site, weather and other natural conditions, as well as the skills of individual paddlers and the group of participants.

1.2 Separate safety guidelines are given for competition paddling and training in various paddling sports.

2 Structure and build of canoes and kayaks

2.1 In these guidelines canoes means kayaks, open canoes or similar vessels powered by a paddle, disregarding inflatable rafts.

2.2 The person responsible for the canoe - the owner, renter or loaner or other user depending on the situation – has to keep the canoe in appropriate condition and order for paddling. The structure and build of the canoe, equipment, strength and stability have to be such that the canoe is safe in the conditions where used.

2.3 The canoe has to be fitted with floating devices or have watertight compartments, and it has to be built and equipped so that it will maintain a level of flotation water filled when loaded with 100 N equivalent weight per each paddler.

2.4 In white water paddling canoes and equipment suitable or fit to the paddling situation in white water have to be used.

3 The equipment of the canoe

3.1 The basic equipment of the canoe are:

- paddle(s);
- approved personal flotation device suitable for the paddler and conditions;
- spraydeck for each cockpit in a kayak;
- toggles or grap loops at the bow and stern and/or deck lines;
- bailing equipment like pumps, vailer or other; and
- a helmet, if the canoe is used in white water or any other situations, where the conditions demand one.

When paddling with open canoes in conditions with an evident risk of water floating the canoe, the canoe has to be equipped with floatation equipment so buoyant that the canoe stays manoeuvrable even when filled with water.

3.2 Each canoe should have a safety sticker in Finnish and Swedish:

“Käytä meloessasi aina melontaliiviä, tarkista kellukkeet ja pidä tyhjennysväline mukana. Ne lisäävät turvallisuutta. Använd alltid flytväst vid paddling och tag med länsningutrustning samt granska flytmedlen. Detta ökar säkerheten.“

Translation: "Always use a personal floatation device (PFD), check floatation equipment and keep a bailer with you. It increases paddling safety."

4 Equipment for the paddlers

4.1 Paddler's equipment includes PFD, lifejacket or buoyancy clothing and a paddling clothing suitable for the condition.

4.2 Other equipment are, according to the judgement of the leader of paddling situation:

- spare clothing packed waterproof ;
 - dry suit or a wet suit, if risk of hypothermia is imminent in immersion;
 - helmet in white water paddling and in other situations demanding it;
 - whistle or other signalling equipment;
 - map and compass;
 - white light when needed; and
 - paddle float, use of which shall be practised in beforehand.

A paddler has to make him/herself visible in all weather conditions by reflectors, bright coloured clothing, banners etc.

4.3 Trip leader's or instructor's equipment includes in addition to 4.1 and 4.2:

- tow line;
- throw line for white water;
- distress rockets and flares, when paddling on open sea or lakes;
- hypothermia blanket;
- first aid kit;
- repair kit and tools for the canoe;
- knife or rescue knife;
- mobile phone;
- radio for listening to weather forecasts;
- spare paddle(s); and
- equipment to make a fire

The trip leader or instructor has to take care of the groups having all the necessary equipment mentioned in 4.2 and 4.3.

All safety equipment has to be packed according to the need and availability.

5 Number of participants on paddling trips

5.1 Paddling trip leader can have directly on his/her responsibility a group of maximum 16 paddlers in maximum 10 canoes. If the groups are bigger, the leader has to name in this paddling situation competent co-leaders so that the above mentioned ratio of leaders and participants is fulfilled.

In a demanding paddling situation safety may require a smaller group per each leader. In each canoe with 4 or more persons there has to be a named person in charge who is capable of steering the canoe.

6 Classification of white water

6.1 White water is divided into classes I-VI and X according to the white water classification of the FCF (see attachment).

The change in water level may change the classification.

The white water classifiers are approved and listed by Finnish Canoeing Trainers and the Finnish Canoeing and Rowing Federation

7 Safety plan

7.1 An organiser of a paddling tour or event has to have a safety plan, which the participants are informed of. At it's simplest this means verbal instructions on how near the shore to paddle, how a boat route is crossed and what to do when a paddler has capsized.

On a demanding trip or tour or while operating repeatedly in the same areas, the safety plan has to be the result of a carefully executed risk analysis and each participant has to know the plan for his/hers part.

When needed, the authorities are informed about the safety plan.

7.2 For a demanding paddling trip or event the experience, skills and endurance of the participants have to be checked. Safety planning is in special focus and all participants are to be told beforehand, what requirements the paddling sets on paddlers' health.

When paddling in difficult white water or on open sea appropriate rescue practises may be required in advance. In easier waters this can mean, if there are less experienced participants, stricter safety rules and monitoring of the rules. The demanding situations can also be compensated by outside safety arrangements, rescue boats and rescuers on shore.

7.3. Organisers of activities mentioned in section 1.1 have to keep statistics of incidents and accidents, and by analysing them change the way of actions where necessary.

8 Operators

8.1 Operators organising paddling activities referred to in section 1.1. have to have a head of paddling safety or other person in charge of paddling activities, who has the personal qualifications, skills, experience and knowledge necessary for the position. The qualifications can be evidenced by a paddling instructor or guide certificate given by FCF, the Finnish Canoeing Trainers or Finnish Canoeing and Rowing Federation or other comparable certificate. The person in charge has to have a minimum age of 18 years.

8.2. Operator of paddling activities can on request get a certificate of a conducted safety monitoring by a monitor approved by The Committee for Paddling Safety in Finland.

8.3. Rental canoe should not be given to anyone, who obviously does not have the ability or skills necessary or whose equipment is unsuitable considering the conditions. All customers of rental services have to be informed on the safety guidelines of paddling.

8.4. It is recommended to have insurance for the organiser of paddling activities, depending on the quality and scope of activities.

9 Responsibilities of the participants

9.1. Participants of paddling events or renters of canoes are to follow the advice given and safety guidelines and must also in their own action take other participant's safety into account.

10 Exceptions

10.1 In easy conditions considering the paddlers' skills, the leader or person in charge of a paddling trip, tour or event can deviate from these guidelines.

Correspondingly, when the paddling situation is demanding, stricter safety norms always have to be considered. In extreme situations the planned paddling activity has to be cancelled.

11 Reinstatement of the safety guidelines

11.1 These safety guidelines for paddling are reinstated on 9 November 2012 and they replace the former guidelines given on 24 April 2002 and the guidelines by the Finnish Maritime Authority of 1 April 1997.