

Standup Paddleboarding: Safety Activity Checkpoints

High Risk



Standup Paddleboarding (SUP) is a surface water sport in which participants are propelled by paddling while standing on a paddleboard. Paddling is a total body effort utilizing core muscles, which minimizes the effort of the paddler's arms alone. Beginners, with proper instruction, can quickly learn to paddle on flat water bays or lakes, while experienced paddlers can tackle ocean surf or rivers. Boards and paddles are available in a variety of sizes and shapes to fit many body types and water conditions.

Beginners should be careful of overexertion as girls unaccustomed to paddling may experience strained muscles. All paddleboarders should pay close attention to their surroundings and not stray too far from shore or their launch point. Care should be taken to gain progressive experience and skills before taking on challenging waterways or conditions. **SUP is not recommended for Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies, and surf and whitewater is not recommended for anyone without proper instruction from a certified instructor.**

The U.S. Coast Guard considers stand up paddleboards as vessels when they are used outside of designated swim areas or ocean surfing zones. Therefore, federal regulations concerning life jackets, sound devices and lights apply.

Caution: You must seek council permission, and have received formalized training, in order go out on any body of water with a current, including rivers.

Know where to go paddleboarding: Many bodies of water (lake, bay, river and ocean) are suitable for SUP, so long as the proper equipment, instructions and safety precautions are used. Beginners should develop strong skills on flat water before taking on ocean water or surf. SUP is done only on water that has been approved by your Girl Scout council, so you should connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Additional information and resources are available at [Disabled Sports USA](#).

Standup Paddleboarding Gear

Required Gear

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears. Read about Coast Guard life jackets [here](#). Belt type inflatables are not recommended.

- Paddleboard sized for the person using it, based on the paddlers weight and experience.
- Paddles of the [appropriate size and style](#) for each participant. Paddles should be 10” longer than the height of the paddler. The easiest way to make sure paddles of the appropriate size are available is to use adjustable paddles. Extras should be kept on hand.

Recommended Gear

- One-piece bathing suit or T-shirt and shorts
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15), apply every two hours, and lip balm
- Goggles for girls who require glasses or contact lenses. If prescription goggles are too expensive for girls to purchase, non-prescription goggles that fit properly over their glasses may be used (fit should be tested before getting into the water); an eye glass strap (also known as a “croakie”) should be used for glasses or sunglasses.
- Boat shoes, water socks or shoes, or other nonslip footwear (no flip-flops)
- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after paddleboarding
- Protective clothing when the water temperature is below 70 degrees
- Paddle leash (leashes should not be used in rivers due to the risk of entrapment)
- Whistle
- For whitewater the following protective gear must be worn: helmets, chest protectors, and arm and leg protection. Rigid boards are not typically used in rivers with rapids, so an inflatable board is recommended.

Prepare for Stand Up Paddleboarding

- Communicate with council and parents.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
 - Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.
 - Ensure participants are able to swim.** Participants’ swimming abilities are classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, etc.) at council-approved sites, or participants provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a swim test is conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.
 - Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints for the recommended adult-to-girl ratios.
 - Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Instructors should be certified by the American Canoe Association (ACA) for [Stand Up Paddleboarding](#). For flat-water SUP, instructors should have completed both Level 1 and Level 2 certification. For whitewater and surf SUP, instructors should have completed both Level 3 and Level 4 certification. Ratio of instructor to participants is 1 to 5 for all water. As an alternative, instructors can hold the [American Red Cross Small Craft Safety certification](#). However, they still must be experienced in SUP, with a skill level greater than the skill level required for the activity (consult your councils guidelines for further information).
- NOTE:** The instructor-to-participant ratio is NOT the same as the adult-to-girl ratio that is found in the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints. Both ratios MUST be complied with when girls are participating in SUP. For example, if there are 15 Juniors participating in SUP, there must be 3 instructors, plus 2 adult Girl Scout volunteers (who are not instructors).
- *Select a safe paddleboarding site.** Ensure that the location chosen complements the girls’ ability levels, and has a soft, sandy or muddy bottom (sharp-edged or rocky bottoms can be dangerous). Trips are not taken to unknown coastal areas, and locations of all boat channels are known and avoided. Also make sure:

- The launching area is free of glass and debris, has a gentle slope and good footing.
 - Busy channels are avoided when possible, and crossed carefully when necessary.
 - Surf zones and areas with standing waves are avoided, except for advanced surf paddleboarding.
 - On long crossings, paddlers are close enough together so that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.
- ☐ **Research water conditions and select paddleboards and paddles appropriate to skill level.** Consider skill level of girls and their physical abilities in choosing the appropriate paddleboard and paddles. Also make sure of the following:
- Board weight and capacity are not exceeded.
 - Each board and paddle are sized for the person using them.
 - You are knowledgeable of the difficulty of the water run and the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#).
 - You are aware of possible changes in [river level](#) and weather, and their effects on the run's level of difficulty.
 - NOTE: Whitewater SUP is not permitted without specialized training from a certified instructor and permission from your council.
- ☐ **Transport paddleboards safely.** Boards are transported on car-top racks or trailers designed to haul paddleboards.
- ☐ **Compile key contacts.** See *the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- ☐ **Respect the environment.** Make sure paddleboarding on whitewater or semi-protected waters meets the [Safety Code of American Whitewater](#).
- ☐ **Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in First Aid, including Adult and Child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of near-drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with Wilderness First Aid. Basic ice rescue techniques are understood and practiced. Appropriate rescue equipment is on hand (for example, ring buoy, rope, throw bag, pole, ladder, boat, where necessary). See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.
- ☐ **Know the Universal River Signals.** Ensure that the adults and/or paddleboarding instructor understand the [American Whitewater codes](#). Also, a set of whistle and visual signals is established that allows messages to pass between participants.
- ☐ **Paddleboarding participants know cold-water survival techniques and treatment for hypothermia.** When paddleboarding in cold water, each person practices appropriate self-rescue and re-boarding techniques (basic information is available on the [U.S. Search and Rescue Task Force site](#)).

On the Day of Paddleboarding

- ☐ **Get a weather report.** Never paddle on a stormy day. On the day of the activity, visit [weather.com](#), [Intellicast](#), or other reliable sources to assess weather conditions, water temperature and river/wave conditions. If weather conditions prevent the trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.
- ☐ **Review rescue tips.** Know how to perform self-rescue techniques and ensure each participant is able to get herself/himself back on the board.
- ☐ **Use the buddy system.** See *the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- ☐ **Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning.** Exit water immediately and take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them. During storms, if shore cannot be reached, secure all loose gear, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions, and stay low.

SUP Links

- American Canoe Association: [www.americancanoe.org](#)
- American Whitewater: [www.americanwhitewater.org](#)

- SUP Industry Association: www.supindustry.org
- National Organization for River Sports: www.nationalrivers.org
- U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division: www.uscgboating.org
- Whitewater Rescue Institute: www.whitewaterrescue.com

***This checkpoint must be reviewed with the vendor and/or facility where appropriate.**