

Physical & Medical Considerations

Drowning – number one killer in paddling sports. Most deaths involve people who are not wearing a Personal Floatation Device (PFD). PFDs are also known as “life jackets”.

Solution:

- Always wear a PFD while paddling.
- Wear a helmet when there is a risk of head injury such as in rocky areas.
- Maintain “wet-exit” proficiency so it will be an instinctive move in a panic situation.
- Learn to recognize and avoid strainers, dangerous hydraulics and other hazards!

Hypothermia – lowering of the body’s core temperature. Hypothermia can occur rapidly, or slowly and silently. It can cause permanent damage or death. A separate section is devoted to prevention of hypothermia and first aid for hypothermic victims.

Solution:

- Constantly monitor your personal temperature. Solve the problem when you first begin to chill. Hydrate, consume simple or complex carbohydrates, increase physical activity, add cover or layers.
- Learn about appropriate clothing and dress for the water temperature. Then, get wet to stay cool.
- Stay hydrated.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine. They are a diuretic and will cause you to dehydrate.

Dehydration – this is a very common problem with paddlers. The consequences can range from simple cramps and headache to unconscious seizures and drowning.

Solution:

- Measure the fluids you drink on a daily basis. Make sure you drink extra when kayaking, especially when suited up for cold water or in hot weather.
- Monitor your frequency of urination.
- Replace sodium, magnesium and potassium lost with heavy perspiration. Gatorade, spike water with electrolytes, salt tablets, etc.

Cramps – cramps can be caused by many things but a common cause during or after kayaking is dehydration or an electrolyte imbalance (loss of sodium).

Solution:

- Stay hydrated and attempt to balance electrolytes as needed.

Headaches – headaches can be caused by many things but a common cause during or after kayaking is dehydration or an electrolyte unbalance (loss of sodium).

Solution:

- Stay hydrated and attempt to balance electrolytes as needed.

Remote Environment – kayaking is most often done in a remote area. External help involves time and distance. Cell phones are often not dependable.

Solution:

- Prevention, prevention, prevention!!
- Use caution to help prevent accidents. Camping, hiking, floating, loading, unloading, etc.
- Know your group. Paddle with people who can help you and train to help others.
- Prepare for personal and medical needs, and be honest about your potential first aid needs. Diabetic, heart, allergies, seizures, breathing problems, etc.
- Prepare for potential rescues.
- Group should carry one or more cell phones, or a satellite phone.
- Always know your location and have an emergency plan. GPS coordinates. Map. Emergency numbers, etc.

First Aid Needs – first aid in remote areas will be more than stabilizing and calling 911. If you can call 911, it will most likely be a while before you can be reached, rescued, extracted, etc. The group must be prepared to help itself until outside help can be obtained.

Solution:

- All paddlers should maintain current first aid and CPR certification.
- All paddlers should, if possible, obtain wilderness first aid or wilderness first responder training.
- Collectively, the group should carry adequate first aid supplies.

Know Your Group – a person with inadequate skills, equipment or knowledge can be a liability to the entire group.

Solution:

- Know the skill level of others in your group.
- Know the rescue and first aid equipment that others are carrying.
- Know the rescue and first aid training that others have.
- Know the special medical considerations or first aid needs that others could have.
- Know where each person carries their insurance card.

Rescue Training– self-rescues and group rescues that happen quickly will very likely be successful. By the time a professional rescue team can arrive, a rescue could be a recovery. The group must be capable of rescuing its own.

Solution:

- Paddle with people who are trained to rescue / save you.
- Obtain rescue training so you can rescue / save others.
- Each paddler should carry basic rescue tools of his/her own and share the load for group equipment.

Toilet Needs - Toilet needs are a natural and normal part of life. Attempting to avoid a toilet stop is not healthy, especially if one dehydrates. Along waterways, poison ivy grows wild. Stay clear of any plant with a three-leaf pattern and, of course, be alert for critters.

In mixed company or when privacy is needed, river safety should always be considered. Here are some ideas to obtain privacy. Locate behind an object that blocks the view. Suggest that your group move downstream a little way and wait for you. Ask your group to look the other way.

Squatting can be a challenge on the river. Try these ideas. Sit over the bow of a kayak. Perhaps turn it over first and use the bottom of the bow. Squat leaning against a tree or rock for balance. Use a PDF for a back cushion for comfort and to protect back and clothing from tree bark.

Human waste can be quite toxic to the environment. Learn the local rules concerning disposal of human waste. National Forests and high traffic rivers will usually have waste rules. Some have requirements that you do you dig a cat hole a certain distance from the stream. Some have rules that require you use portable toilets and carry out all waste material. In some desert areas you must urinate in the stream and carry out solids. Kansas has no such rules and makes little effort to maintain clean water. Please, at least be a good citizen and cover waste with sand, leaves, etc. Be sure to pack out all waste paper and other trash.

A zip lock bag makes a nice roll paper dispenser. Another plastic sack can be used to pack out waste.

Revised: January 16, 2013 by Chris Collins