

Introduction to Rescue

Rescue can be very involved and technical or quick and simple. The most common rescues are very simple. This document suggests that you be initially prepared for the most common rescues, carry a few pieces of gear that can be used by trained rescuers in a group rescue, acquire specific rescue training and practice the skills needed so you will be ready to help yourself or a friend.

Rescue = get swimmer out of danger or keep the swimmer from danger, reduce exposure, render care, and retrieve equipment as needed. Most rescues (a kayaker missing a roll) are not serious issues because we stop them from becoming serious.

Swiftwater Rescue (SWR) applies to swiftwater situations in rivers and creeks. Sea Kayak Rescue applies to open water situations such as in a lake, bay or ocean. Rescue in a surf zone might entail techniques from both sea kayak rescue and swiftwater rescue.

Sea Kayak Rescue skills are needed by anyone who paddles deep or open water. The biggest risk to the swimmer is exposure to the cold water and the other major risk is having their equipment blown away which ultimately increases their exposure and could result in death. During training you will learn at least 2 ways to self-rescue (get yourself upright and on your way) and several assisted rescue methods/techniques. In all cases the idea is to get the swimmer back in their boat, water pumped out and on their way.

Swiftwater Rescue skills are needed if you paddle swiftwater or whitewater. The greatest risks to the swimmer are strainers, foot entrapments, etc that are caused by the swiftwater. Equipment is always secondary. During basic training you will learn to throw a rope, tow a swimmer, rescue a boat, paddle with two paddles, etc. In more advanced training you will learn to use ropes, pulleys, carabineers, anchors, mechanical advantage, etc. to rescue entrapped victims and pinned equipment.

Basic Swiftwater Rescue Skills (SWR) and Equipment:

(The little bit of equipment you carry can be joined with other's equipment to perform a group rescue. All whitewater boaters should carry at least the basics.)

Whistle – accessible with either hand while the other hand is being used to hold your head out of the water while caught in a strainer, for instance.

Rescue Rope / Throw Rope – must be bigger than ¼ inch and at least 1900 lbs. 5/16 X 75 foot MaxGrip is recommended for kayakers. 3/8 X 75 foot is the best but does not fit in smaller kayaks.

2 locking carabineers – the lock is to keep unwanted items from getting hooked.

25 feet of 1 inch or ½ inch Climbing Grade Tubular Webbing – consumable items, used for anchors and will protect good rope from abrasion.

Ability to tow a swimmer to shore or eddy with one or two paddles in hand.

Ability to “tug-boat” a kayak to shore or an eddy.

Ability to accurately and consistently use your throw rope to aid a swimmer or get a line across the stream.

Ability to catch, and knowledge how to catch a rope if you are the swimmer being rescued.

Current certification in Red Cross First Aid and CPR.

Obtain additional SWR training and practice skills learned to maintain proficiency.

When possible wear a SWR Rescue PFD. It has special features to help rescue and be rescued in swiftwater.

Basic Sea Kayak Rescue Skills & Equipment:

Boat, and a sprayskirt that seals out water.

Floatation in both the bow and stern. Sealed hatches and/or secured float bags.

Deck rigging to accommodate a paddle-float self-rescue.

Paddle float and bilge pump in good working shape.

Whistle, flares, radio, GPS, maps

Tow rope – must have quick release and include a bungee cord.

Recommended – paddle leash and/or spare paddle

Proficient with the “paddle-float” self-rescue. 2 minutes to completion should be your goal. Practice in same sea conditions you will paddle.

Proficient with several other methods of assisted rescues. Practice as the rescuer and the swimmer.

Practice all sea kayak rescues in the same sea conditions you will or might paddle. Rescues will be come increasingly difficult in rough seas. Wave shapes and periods are quite different between ocean and lakes. Lake practice does not necessarily qualify your for an ocean rescue. Ocean practice does not necessarily qualify you for a lake rescue.

Additional Skills Taught During SWR Training:

Swiftwater Rescue (SWR) training is a necessity for all whitewater boaters and those who wish to paddle swift or flooded rivers using any craft. Whitewater boaters must be able to rescue each

other and/or join a rescue team if an incident occurs. Much of SWR training is about prevention and will make one a safer boater. Professional rescues take too much time in remote areas. The longer a rescue takes the less chance there is for a successful outcome. Your group must be able to self-rescue and administer any needed first aid if an incident occurs.

Please enroll in a new SWR workshop each year or two and practice to stay proficient! Here are some of the topics that will be covered:

Rescue Swimming – defensive swimming, aggressive swimming, tethered swimming

Rescue Philosophy – what and when you should do what, what you should not do, very important information

Rope Throwing – throwing a stuffed bag and re-throwing loose rope, where to throw, how to catch

Live Bait Rescue – rescuer is a tethered swimmer jumping in to save victim

“V-Lower” – rescuer is lowered / maneuvered from both shores to specific point in swiftwater

Strainer Drill – learn how dangerous strainers can be and how to possibly save yourself if caught in one

Entrapments – learn how to rescue an entrapped person such as a person with a foot entrapment

Pins – learn to rescue pinned equipment such as broached or pinned boats, learn how to attach to a boat reducing the chance of damage

Mechanical Advantage – learn to use ropes, pulleys, carabineers, prussic loops, etc. to multiply your efforts and obtain more pull or lift than humanly possible

Knots – learn and use the rescue knots, good knots are strong, don't damage ropes and can be untied easily

Anchors – learn how to set an anchor in the toughest of places

Cinch Lines – learn to cinch around an object or person

Line Crossings – learn several ways to get a line across swiftwater

Much More – SWR is a huge topic. Each time you take the training, you will learn more. Each time you practice what you learn, you will be better prepared.