Sea Kayak Rescues

Overview:

The rescues discussed here are intended for open water such as lakes, bays and ocean. If a capsize occurs in the surf zone, the swimmer will most likely need to swim out of the surf zone. Moving water or river kayaking requires different rescue techniques, involves a nearby shore and always requires rescuing the swimmer first to prevent them from drifting into danger. On open water, loss of equipment puts the swimmer at greater risk and increases their exposure.

General:

Capsizing is part of kayaking, especially during the initial learning stages.

If you fail to execute an Eskimo roll for any reason, you will be in the water. Paddle with others but don't depend on them. All could be knocked down at the same time.

Wind and waves can quickly separate a kayak, paddle and swimmer. Rough water makes many pool rescues unusable. After initial learning, develop the following rescue skills and practice in rough water. Develop proficiency in water equal to, or rougher than water being paddled.

All Rescues: (Open Water)

Assess the situation and hazards. Is the swimmer at risk or just floating? Are others available to assist? What is the swimmer's skill level?

#1 GOAL: Get the swimmer back in the kayak and get the water out of the kayak.

Don't let rough conditions separate the swimmer from his/her equipment.

Select the quickest and simplest rescue for the situation. The T-rescue is used almost exclusively on open water.

It is as important that you can help others rescue you, as it is that you can help rescue others.

Equipment and Boat Outfitting: Kayaks must have **floatation** at both ends. Sealed hatches and/or float bags are required to keep either end from sinking. A **spray skirt** is required to keep waves from filling boat after re-entry and while pumping. **Thigh braces** are highly recommended to maintain proper control. Suitable d**eck rigging** is required to enable a paddle float rescue. A **pump** is the only good method of removing excess water from the hull. A **paddle leash** can be useful in open water but should not be used in the surf zone or on moving water.

Paddle Float Rescue:

Overview: Other than an Eskimo roll, this is the only usable self-rescue on rough water. All paddlers, regardless of their ability to roll should be proficient with this rescue. This rescue always works as a backup but is seldom used because it is the slowest rescue and extends the swimmer's exposure to the elements.

Learn this rescue first. The other rescues will come easy after learning to climb in the boat.

1 After wet-exit: Hang on to paddle and boat. Leave boat upside down so it won't take on any additional water.

2 Float on your back with one leg in the cockpit toward the bow of the boat which remains upside down trapping air. This permits the use of both hands to attach and secure the paddle float to the paddle.

3 Still floating on back with leg in the cockpit, relax and inflate the paddle float.

4 Position yourself on the downwind or down wave side of the boat. Wind and waves should move the boat toward you instead of away from you.

5 Remove leg, face boat, reach under boat to opposite side of cockpit. Take a breath of air. Place paddle under arm pits of both arms as you pull the opposite side of the cockpit toward you. At the same time push up on the boat with enough force to sink yourself. This will scoop the least amount of water as you continue to flip the boat over. If done correctly very little water will remain in the boat.

6 Attach the paddle and paddle float to the boat forming an outrigger.

7 Beginning on the aft side (for long boats) of the paddle, kick feet and swim up across the stern of the boat. You should be face down on the stern deck just far enough aft to permit dropping your feet in the cockpit. Stay low and keep weight slightly shifted toward the paddle float. A leg or foot can be placed on top of the paddle to assist but be careful not to push the paddle out of the deck rigging.

8 Place the hand nearest the paddle float, on the paddle shaft and push down lightly as you rotate your body toward the paddle float. Watch the paddle float as you rotate. Keep low and keep some weight on the paddle shaft with the hand. As you rotate you will need to switch hands and drop into the cockpit.

9 While keeping a little weight toward the paddle float, attach the spray skirt. Insert the pump between the spray skirt and your stomach. Pump until no more water can be pumped.

10 Remove paddle, detach paddle float if conditions permit and paddle away.

Side Rescue:

Overview: This rescue is preferred over the T-rescue if the boat is heavily loaded. It is still slow because the boat is usually full of water and requires lots of pumping.

The side rescue is exactly like the paddle float rescue, except another boater holds the boat steady while the person being rescued re-entered the kayak.

1 Instruct the swimmer to hang on to paddle and boat, and leave the boat upside down so it won't take on any additional water.

2 Relax, get you wits and communicate.

3 Right the boat either using the same method as used in the paddle float rescue or help the rescuer use a boat over boat. The goal is to right the boat, scooping the least amount of water.

4 Place the boats along side each other in a **bow to stern configuration**. The boat being rescued should be on the down wind or down wave side of the boat doing the rescuing. The rescuer's boat helps block wind and waves from the swimmer.

5 The rescuer places both paddles across both boats and under his/her arms to prevent them from blowing away. The rescuer grabs both front sides of the cockpit combing of the boat being rescued.

6 The person being rescued kicks, swims and pulls self up on the stern, face down and head toward the stern just as in the paddle float rescue. You can help by pulling on a PFD strap.

7 Stay low, watch the assistant's boat as you rotate and drop feet in the cockpit, just as in the paddle float rescue.

8 Attach spray skirt. Insert pump between spray skirt and stomach. Pump all water out before the assistant releases a grip on the swimmer's boat.

T-Rescue:

Overview: This is the quickest and most often used assisted rescue on open water. The boat is emptied using a boat over boat technique before the swimmer re-enters the kayak.

Instruct the swimmer to hang on to paddle and boat, and leave the boat upside down so it won't take on any additional water.

1 Relax, get you wits and communicate. **Locate the bow.** This rescue is almost impossible if you try lifting the stern.

2 Position the boat so the assistant can reach the bow. The swimmer should be at the stern of the capsized boat

3 Place your paddle(s) across your cockpit, tucked in your stomach and under both arms.

4 Place your nearest hand on top of the overturned boat as you reach under water with the other hand. Lean or edge toward the capsized boat.

5 Instruct the swimmer to push down, sinking the stern while you lift the bow over your cockpit. Twist or rotate the boat slightly as needed to break the vacuum and let the excess water run to an aft corner of the cockpit against the rear bulkhead or float bag. Slide the boat over the cockpit as needed to empty as much water as practical.

6 Place the boats along side each other in a **bow to stern configuration**. The boat being rescued should be on the down wind or down wave side of the boat doing the rescuing. The rescuer's boat helps block wind and waves from the swimmer.

7 The rescuer places both paddles across both boats and under his/her arms to prevent them from blowing away. The rescuer grabs both front sides of the cockpit combing of the boat being rescued.

8 The person being rescued kicks, swims and pulls self up on the stern, face down and head toward the stern just as in the paddle float rescue. You can help by pulling on a PFD strap.

9 Stay low, watch the assistant's boat as you rotate and drop feet in the cockpit, just as in the paddle float rescue.

10 Attach spray skirt. Insert pump between spray skirt and stomach. Pump all water out before the assistant releases a grip on the swimmer's boat.

Reference: Sea Kayaking Safety & Rescue, John Lull, Wilderness Press, ISBN 0-89997-274-8. This book contains detailed instructions for each of the rescues listed above, variations and other rescues and safety information.

Revised: January 21, 2006 by Chris Collins