

Suggested Guidelines

for

SAFE OPERATIONS OF

SEA KAYAKS

&

POWER VESSELS

IN

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND



Topics Covered in this Guide:

- What Kayakers Should Know About Power Vessel Operations
- What Power Vessel Operators Should Know About Sea Kayakers
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- Guidelines for Power Vessel Operators
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What Kayakers Should Know About Power Vessel Operators:

- When power boat operators are heading into the sun, it is virtually impossible for them to see kayaks. Comm. fishing vessels often have no one at the wheel, while fishing.
- Kayaks are usually not visible on a power boat's radar. Kayakers should not rely on a boat's radar to alert a skipper to their presence.
- When a power vessel traveling at high speed slows down, it creates a larger wake as this vessel settles into the water.
- Big vessels produce a bow & a stern wake, the latter being bigger & more dangerous
- If a vessel does not respond to your VHF radio call, call again. The vessel operator may have been on the radio to another boat or using the PA system to speak to passengers.

What Power Vessel Operators Should Know About Sea Kayakers:

- Because sea kayakers carry their "life support" systems (food, clothing, tents, sleeping bags, etc.) in their kayaks, a fully loaded kayak may weigh 250 or more pounds. Kayaks and survival equipment are particularly vulnerable to being damaged by large wakes when loading or unloading on a beach as the kayaks cannot be quickly picked up and carried out of the wake zone.
- Wakes breaking onshore against a loaded kayak may push the kayak into a kayaker causing severe bruising or a broken leg.
- Kayakers usually travel close to shore to stay out of the way of power vessels. However, large wakes breaking against cliffs give kayakers a "double whammy." First they get the incoming wake, then the reflected wave off the cliff.
- A power vessel with a large wake traveling at high speeds close to sea kayakers can capsize a sea kayak if the kayakers do not have sufficient time to turn "bow-into" the wake.
- In bad weather (winds over 15 knots), kayakers are less likely to be able to maneuver. Giving them room is the best option unless assistance is clearly being requested.

Guidelines for Sea Kayakers:

- Increase your visibility by wearing bright clothing, using a bright (not dark) colored kayak, paddles with white rather than black blades, and putting reflector tape on your kayak paddles and life jackets.
- Learn the Boating Sound Signals so you can understand a vessel operator's intentions when he gives you a sound signal.
- Carry flares to use in distress.
- Carry a good, water repellent VHF Radio, along with extra batteries, that is readily available for use.
- Avoid landing & launching in a potential surf zone when their wakes are approaching. Use beaches that are protected from possible surf & wakes for rest breaks &/or carry your boats up out of the surf zone if possible. When loading or unloading for camp, empty & move the kayaks up the beach as quickly as possible.
- In narrow passageways or places where power vessels have limited maneuverability, stay out of the main channel. Do not impede traffic in a harbor or harbor entrances.
- Move into & away from harbor entrances quickly to avoid wakes from vessels accelerating and slowing down.
- If you are traveling in a group & you see a vessel approaching, move into a tight group to increase your visibility. Wave your paddles high above your head to alert the vessel operator of your presence.
- If a power vessel approaches you heading into the sun, try waving your paddles high above your head in a back and forward motion to alert them of your presence.
- When rounding blind corners or areas with submerged reefs, be aware that boat wakes can be dangerous. Wait until the boat and subsequent wake pass before proceeding.
- When crossing a passageway or open water, cross in a tight group and consider using a small radar reflector.
- Before crossing in high traffic areas or in poor visibility, give a SECURITY on your VHF radio.

Guidelines For Power Vessel Operators:

- Always travel at a safe speed for the conditions. Reduce speeds when weather conditions or blind corners reduce your visibility. Never travel faster than you are capable of responding to avoid an accident or close encounter.
- Stay sufficiently far away from kayakers that they have time to maneuver “bow-into” your approaching wake.
- On leaving and approaching harbor entrances, look for kayakers and plan your acceleration or slowing down so they have time to turn into the wake. Kayaks have been capsized in this situation.
- Avoid traveling close to shore, especially around blind corners. Kayakers ranked encountering a vessel rounding a blind corner as the most likely cause of a sea kayaking fatality. When rounding a blind corner in an area sea kayakers use, give one prolonged blast as a warning. Listen to your radio for a response. Take action to avoid a close encounter or collision.
- When kayakers are near cliffs, consider reducing your speed to minimize your wake, well before you reach them, or give the area a wider berth.
- If you inadvertently place a large wake close to kayakers where they may not be able to head “bow-into” it, look back after passing and make sure you have not capsized a kayak.

Sound Signals:

- The following maneuvering signals are used when vessels are in sight of one another or to announce a vessel’s presence when vessels are in sight of one another.
 - 1 Short blast: I am altering course to starboard (to the right).
 - 2 Short blasts: I am altering course to port.
 - 1 Prolonged blast every 2 min: Power vessel underway in reduced visibility.
 - 5 Short blasts: Danger signal.

Sound Signals At Blind Corners:

- Power vessels rounding a blind corner in areas used by kayakers should indicate their approach with **1 PROLONGED BLAST**.
- Kayakers should immediately respond on their VHF radio giving a Security announcement on Ch 16 as follows: SECURITY, SECURITY, SECURITY, vessel rounding blind corner, there is a kayaker (or group of kayaks) at _____ (location: such as 100 yards from point and 10 yards offshore).

Communications:

- Channel 16 is the standard hailing and distress channel for vessels in Alaskan waters. Initial contact is made on Ch 16, then if more discussion is necessary the parties agree to switch to another channel. Channel 22A is for communicating with the Coast Guard.
- It is advisable that kayakers carry & know how to use a VHF radio. The best VHF radios for Alaskan coastal conditions are water repellent & have 5 watts power; carry extra batteries

Using a VHF Radio:

1. Listen to make sure no one else is speaking
2. Establish contact on Ch 16 giving first the NAME of the boat you are calling (if known, or type of boat and description of its location-“tour boat approaching Pt. Decision”), THIS IS NAME (of your boat or party). To avoid confusion, never reverse this sequence. You may repeat the name of the boat you are calling a few times, but do not repeat your name and call sign. Keep your call short. If the boat does not respond, wait two minutes before trying again, unless it is an emergency.
3. When contact is established, switch to a working channel – 9 if with a commercial boat; 68, 69, 71, 72, and 78 for recreational boats. Fishing vessels often monitor channel 6. Listen to make sure no one else is using the channel. Communications should be short and about operational or safety concerns.
4. Sign off giving your NAME when you are finished on the working channel.

Assistance and Emergency Protocols:

MAYDAY calls are made only when one is in grave & imminent danger. Being weathered in, overdue, out of fuel, engine problems, or having a stuck anchor are not MAYDAY situations. In these less severe situations, call the Valdez Coast Guard on Ch 16, and they will help you obtain appropriate rescue services.

Making a MAYDAY call:

1. On Channel 16 state: MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY, THIS IS KAYAK PARTY so and so, or name of vessel (repeated 3 times)
2. WHERE you are (latitude & longitude if known otherwise the most exact descriptive position possible).
3. WHAT is wrong (collision, sinking, fire, injured person, etc.)
4. NUMBER of persons in party and the condition of any injured.
5. PRESENT SEAWORTHINESS of kayak
6. DESCRIPTION of the boat (red single person kayak, etc.)
7. Give YOUR LISTENING FREQUENCY and schedule
8. Conclude: THIS IS KAYAK PARTY so and so, or name of vessel. OVER

Local Knowledge:

- Never kayak in an unfamiliar area w/o a local chart or special map (e.g., *Trails Illustrated*, *PWS W & E*). Keep track of your location & note local names for points & bays.
- When kayaking in unfamiliar area, even if you have a chart, seek local knowledge, including weather & sea conditions. Good sources include the harbormaster and kayak outfitters and transporters.
- Check with the harbor staff about local high traffic areas, such as small boat ramp, commercial fishing areas, & harbor entrances, where potential conflict might exist. Avoid these areas or use caution.
- A float trip plan, left at the harbormaster's office, is highly advisable.
- NOAA Weather radio on VHF channels 1& 2 continuously broadcasts area forecasts.



Guidelines Developed in partnership with:

Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Assc
Kayak Outfitters & Transporters for PWS*
Chugach National Forest**

Notice:

This guide is meant to complement and not replace the federal laws that govern maritime traffic. Prudent mariners should not rely on this guide as their only source of information about vessel traffic patterns, Rules of the Road, and safe boating practices in Alaska, and should at all times comply with applicable laws.

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*Alaska Sea Kayakers
Vision Quest Adventures
PWS Kayak Center

Honey Charters
Lazy Otter Charters
Sound Eco Adventures

**For more information on wildlife viewing, private land, leave-no-trace camping, glacier and iceberg dangers, etc., see the USFS brochure: *Prince William Sound, Alaska – travel safely...wisely...lightly*