



Boating activities are popular in Scouting. Scouts earned 35,000 Kayaking and 32,000 Canoeing merit badges in 2014. Approximately 12,000 participants at the 2013 National Scout Jamboree took guided raft trips on the New River.

Injuries and fatalities, while rare, have occurred during Scout boating activities, and there are lessons to be learned that can protect lives in the future.

Incident Review #1

A unit was setting up camp when three youth began paddling a canoe on a small, calm inlet. Then they paddled onto the windy, choppy waters of the main lake, ignoring shouted instructions to put on life jackets. Avoiding a leader in a kayak who tried to bring life jackets to them, they began paddling rapidly along a distant shoreline. The leader returned to shore to deal with other situations, and later it was learned that the canoe had capsized and the paddlers were shouting for help. One youth made it to shallow water, and another was rescued by a leader who swam out with a life jacket. The third boy, a 17-year-old, submerged in the deep, murky water. Authorities took over the efforts to recover his body.

Key Points

- According to the American Canoe Association, 85 percent of fatality victims in canoeing incidents were not wearing life jackets.
- The Safety Afloat points of qualified supervision and discipline are key to a successful boating experience.
- Distractions can affect supervision. In this case, the attention of leaders was diverted by a rock-throwing incident back at the camp.



Incident Reviews #2 and #3

Control of a small sailboat was lost when the sail dropped. The sailboat was then struck by a motorboat. An 11-year-old Scout was thrown from the sailboat by the collision. The boy was submerged and suffered a head laceration, but he recovered.

In another incident, a 12-year-old Scout tubing with a buddy fell off into the water when the motorboat towing the tube made a turn. Not noticing the fall, the boat driver circled around, and the Scout was struck by the prop. He died shortly thereafter.

Key Points

- Be alert to other boats sharing the water, which can pose a hazard.
- Dedicated lookouts, mirrors, and vigilance by all on board are essential to safe towing.



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“Many victims in fatal boating incidents do not wear life jackets.”



Incident Review #4

Four youth and two leaders were in a motorboat, returning to camp in the dark after having dinner on an island in a large lake. One of the youth was killed and the other passengers were injured when the boat struck a rock.

Key Points

- Boating after sunset increases risk.
- Keep all craft under control at a sensible speed, and maintain a constant lookout.



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Discussion Questions

- How do the nine points of Safety Afloat help prevent boating incidents?
- What supervision should unit leaders provide when conducting boating programs?
- What key factors should be considered in planning boating activities and establishing emergency response plans?
- How important is participant skill in preventing boating incidents?
- What lessons have you learned in this Incident Review?
- How will you apply those lessons the next time your unit has a boating activity?

Resources

Safety Afloat awareness training at my.scouting.org

Aquatics Supervision, No. 34346—skills training for adults

Canoeing, Kayaking, Motorboating, Rowing, Small-Boat Sailing, Water Sports, and Whitewater merit badge pamphlets

Reading the Rhythms of Rivers and Rapids DVD, No. 430-605

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“ Qualified supervision, personal health review, swimming ability, life jackets, buddy system, skill proficiency, planning, equipment, and discipline make up the nine points of the BSA’s Safety Afloat.”