

Critical Judgment

Understanding and Preventing Canoe and Kayak Fatalities

A publication by the National Safe Boating Council
and the American Canoe Association

Everyone involved with paddling during the last few years should have noticed great changes in training and equipment and a tremendous growth in popularity of the sport. To help understand what these changes mean to our community, 2 of our nations most respected boating organizations (with the help of many others) have attempted to compile data to shed light on this sport in an attempt to increase safety and reduce the number of fatalities on the water. Published under the title of CRITICAL JUDGEMENT and available on-line through the American Canoe Association and the National Safe Boating Council, this report is a must for all paddlers.

An Overview

CRITICAL JUDGEMENT attempts to analyze the components of the paddlesport community and to look at accident reports involving fatalities for each component. The report found that in 2002 there were 20.6 million Americans who paddled in canoes, 20.2 million who went rafting and 7.3 million who paddled kayaks. The study was based on 403 fatal accident reports that involved canoes and kayaks during the years 1996-2000.

Selected Findings

The report found that 75% of all fatal accidents involved canoes and 25% involved kayaks. As there are roughly 3 times the numbers of canoeists, the incidence is about the same for each type of craft. The number of fatal accidents has risen from 43 in 1996 to 103 in 2000, roughly corresponding to the growth of the sport. On average 75% of the accidents involved capsized. The report found only 30% of fatalities occurred in strong current and 70% occurred in no current. Of all canoe fatalities, 83% were not wearing a PFD. Of all kayak fatalities, 44% were not wearing a PFD. The report found that 50% of all canoe and kayak fatalities involved fishing.

Selected Recommendations

CRITICAL JUDGEMENT makes recommendations for both individuals and public policy. These include PFD use, hands on training as well as better accident reporting and paddler specific safety programs. More study is forthcoming from both sponsor groups.

Clearly, all members of the Kansas Canoe Association should be proud in light of this publication. All the areas found to contribute to paddlesports fatalities have been addressed by the KCA since its inception. However all members should study this report for the purpose of outreach. We are the ones to reach the "at risk" populations and instill principles of safe paddling. We will all gain from the effort.

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