

Mason County Kayak Club – Paddle Outings Protocol

(For all paddlers)

Before you go out onto the water:

1. Good judgment is the best safety tool you have. Find out in advance what conditions will likely exist during the outing, including the distance being traveled and probable currents. It is your responsibility to evaluate the difficulty and demands of any outing, using resources available to you such as tide and current information, discussions with people familiar with the area of the journey, and, if you think it appropriate, a visit to the area to observe conditions there personally. Be conservative, and never go on a trip that requires skill levels that exceed yours.
2. Prepare an ID card with your name, address and phone number, and the name of an emergency contact and information about how to reach that person in an emergency. Laminate the card (or otherwise waterproof it) and affix it inside your kayak's cockpit so it is always there.
3. Bring your PFD with an emergency signaling whistle attached, and carry a waterproof ID card (your driver's license or a home-made card). For any outing that *could* continue after dark, bring a long-burning waterproof white light that can be attached to your clothing where other paddlers will be able to see it. Bring water and a snack, and emergency equipment that you own, such as a tow line, paddle float, bilge pump, spare paddle, VHF radio, first aid kit, and a space blanket.
4. Check the condition of your kayak, paddle, and all other equipment before you load it.
5. Tell your spouse, a close friend, or some other emergency contact (a) what time you are going out, (b) the location of the launch point, (c) where you will be paddling, and (d) when they should expect you to be back. Ask this person to notify search and rescue assistance if you are not back (or have not made contact) by a specified time.
6. Arrange to arrive at the launch area at least 30 minutes before departure is scheduled.

At the launch site:

1. Help others unload their boats and gear, and help them get it all to the water.

2. Stay near the launch area after you have launched.
3. **All** kayakers will **always** participate in a brief pre-outing meeting on the water before the group leaves the launch area. The P.O.C. may ask you to take on a specific responsibility for the trip. If you are an experienced paddler, consider offering to act as a sweeper or rear guard.
4. If you arrive late, and the group has already departed, you may join the outing if you feel comfortable paddling alone, but you are on your own until you reach the group.

On the water:

1. Stay together – don't break off from the group alone. If a smaller group wants to explore away from the main group, tell the trip P.O.C. who you are and where you're going. If you leave the outing early for any reason, tell the P.O.C. that you are leaving when you do so.
2. **Whistle signals:** One whistle blast means "attention"; two means "assemble"; three blasts means "emergency". Paddlers should signal any emergency they observe, not just one affecting themselves.
3. **Flashing light:** Any color flashing light on or close to another paddler means "emergency".
4. **Capsize response:** If you see someone go over, give an emergency signal and move towards the capsize. Get close, continue signaling the emergency, but do not intervene immediately. Give the paddler 30 seconds or so to try to roll upright or do a wet exit. Intervene only if you think the paddler has been down too long or if the paddler reaches up and pounds on the exposed hull of his or her kayak.

At the landing site:

1. Help others load boats and gear.
2. One of the first paddlers to get loaded to leave should check to be sure his or her own car will start, and then "police" the landing area looking for left-behind gear. One paddler with a cell phone should stay until all cars have started and, while waiting, "police" the loading area looking for left-behind gear.