



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Stay Afloat in Your Boat

Paddle-Sport Vessel Fatalities — Maine 2000–2007

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

As summer vacation approaches, people are getting out their canoes, kayaks, and inflatable floats for a trip to the beach, lake, or river. Unfortunately, a day of fun on the water can be deadly if people let their excitement overcome common sense. A water outing can be both fun and safe if you follow a few simple precautions.

Dr. Eric Tongren is an EIS officer based in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, and he's joining us by phone today to discuss boating safety. Welcome to the show, Eric.

[Dr. Tongren] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Eric, what type of boating activities did you research in your study?

[Dr. Tongren] In Maine, we looked at specifically paddle sport vessels or paddle sport activities. We looked at canoes, kayaks, and inflatable rafts. This subset of the recreational boating market is actually becoming the most popular over the last decade, in terms of participation and sales. And it's also very accessible for the majority of the population, as compared to motor boats and other recreational boatings, which incur more of a cost.

[Dr. Gaynes] How many deaths are attributable to this activity each year?

[Dr. Tongren] Nationally, per year in boating deaths, as a total, there's around 700 deaths. And paddle sports, which include kayaks, canoes, and rafts, as I said, account for about 100 of these, so 15 percent. In Maine, we looked at this specifically, and we found that the numbers in Maine are 3 times the national average, so we have about 46 percent paddle sport fatalities in Maine, as compared to 15 percent nationally.

[Dr. Gaynes] What's the most common type of boating activity?

[Dr. Tongren] The most common type of boating activity in Maine is canoeing, followed by kayaking, and rafting is the third.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are these self-powered boats, like canoes and kayaks, safer than motor boats?

[Dr. Tongren] The problem with paddle sport vessels is that they are inherently unstable, and a lot of people don't take this into account when they participate in paddle sports. Our research has shown the majority of people actually capsize or fall out of these vessels, and they are not prepared for falling out of the vessel.

[Dr. Gaynes] What kinds of mistakes or oversights do people make that get them into trouble?

[Dr. Tongren] The major mistake that people make is that they are unprepared for their paddle sports experience. They're inexperienced, they do not wear a life jacket, and many times, they drink alcoholic beverages before and during their paddle sport experience, as well.

[Dr. Gaynes] So what precautions can you recommend to help people stay safe on the water?

[Dr. Tongren] First and foremost, we recommend wearing a life jacket. In many instances, the majority of our fatalities are not wearing life jackets and in canoeists, in particular, 95 percent of canoeists who died were not wearing life jackets. The second thing is to avoid alcoholic beverages before and during paddle sport activities because they can impair your judgment, and you need your judgment when you are participating in these activities. And third, become prepared by taking a boating safety course, which will underlie many of the dangers inherent with paddle sport activities, in terms of the inherent instability of boats and problems with water temperature in Maine.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about boating safety?

[Dr. Tongren] People can get general boating information from a website at the CDC at www.cdc.gov and search for boating safety. Specifically, people can get information about this particular paddle sport course—it's called Paddle Smart—at a phone number which is 1-888-367-8777.

[Dr. Gaynes] Eric, thanks for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Tongren] Thank you very much.

[Dr. Gaynes] That's it for this week's show. Be sure and join us again next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.