

U.S. Coast Guard Regulations for Stand Up Paddlers

U.S. Coast Guard Regulations for Stand Up Paddlers: wear that pfd! The sport of SUP boarding has exploded. Thousands of new folks are getting on the water with their boards for the first time. It's great, it's fun, but do you know what you need to have and do to be legal on the water?

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) has determined that SUP boards operated outside a surfing, swimming or bathing area are "vessels" under USCG regulations. The following refers to what that means for you when you're outside those areas.

Life Jackets:

Each paddler 13 years of age or older must have a USCG-approved Type I, II, III, or appropriate Type V (see below) life jacket. It doesn't have to be worn, although that's certainly the wisest plan, and one which we strongly recommend.

A child 12-years old or younger must wear their USCG-approved life jacket.

The jacket must be in "serviceable condition," without rips, tears or deterioration that will diminish its performance.

The jacket must be of an appropriate size and fit for the wearer.

A Type V jacket can be used as long as it's USCG-approved and applicable for the activity.

Belt pouch-type inflatable PFDs, such as the ones we carry, must be worn on the person to meet the life jacket regulation. For other types of inflatable PFDs, check the approval description printed on the unit for restrictions.

For all life jackets, be sure to read the label to know if special requirements pertain to that device.

Other Required Gear:

A whistle or other sound producing device must be carried to warn other boaters.

If you're on the water after sunset, you need to have a flashlight, or similar lighting device, to warn other boaters.

What You Need to Do:

As the operator of a vessel, you need to follow the Navigation Rules.

You are also required to report any boating accident or injury to the local reporting authority, either the USCG or other agency that has been delegated that authority.

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So, if you have this gear and follow these rules you should be legal under USCG regulations. State and local agencies may have additional rules or more restrictive versions of the federal ones.

Remember, on a SUP board you're about the most vulnerable person on the water. Watch out for power boats and other crafts; use your signaling devices to help them spot you. Wearing brightly colored life jackets and apparel in well traveled waterways can be a life saver. Also, many boating accidents involve alcohol; it's best to leave the celebration until you're back on shore.

Have a great time on the water and above all, boat safe!