

## DISCOVER THE RULES AROUND LIFE JACKETS (PFDS), SAFETY KITS, LIGHTS AND MORE

*No matter how hard you paddle, you'll never outrun the heat. Learn about what laws apply to paddlers.*

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The rules of the high seas—and the low lakes and the rivers running between—are a federal concern. You might just be puttering around a local pond, but the laws governing your outing come from no less an authority than the [Canada Shipping Act, 2001](#).

### Canoe and Kayak Laws

Given the low speeds and relaxing nature of most human-powered boating, the authorities aren't so concerned with how you paddle or where you do it. You aren't going to run anyone over while under paddle power, even in a tandem touring kayak. Broadly speaking, stay sober and out of shipping lanes and you'll escape the long arm of the law.

The main area where the law intrudes into paddling activities is in dictating what safety equipment you should have on board. The good news is the rules are, generally, clear and the requirements are not onerous.

Below is a list of the equipment you need, with some notes included, because what law doesn't need some interpretation?

### Canoe and Kayak Life Jacket Laws

A [Canadian Red Cross](#) drowning report showed 88% of drowning victims were not wearing a properly fastened and fitted life jacket or PFD. Some think of PFDs as big, bulky, keyhole-style monstrosities, but modern vests are slim, comfortable and stylish. They won't flip you over if you are unconscious, but in the eyes of the law they are required safety gear.

The law requires a properly sized PFD on board for each person on a boat. Buoyant "lifesaving cushions" are not approved safety equipment. It's recommended children always wear their PFDs, but there is no age under which the wearing of a PFD is required by law. Bottom line: responsible paddlers always wear their PFDs on the water.

There are no approved flotation devices for children weighing less than 9 kg. Transport Canada recommends not boating with children under that weight.

PFDs must be marked as Transport Canada-approved. However, tourists can use their own equipment as long as it fits and conforms to the laws of their home country.

Inflatable PFDs are recognized, but with caveats. It's not enough to just have them on board, they must be worn. Inflatable PFDs are not approved for use in whitewater. Children under the age of 16 or weighing less than 36 kg may not use an inflatable PFD.

The fine for boating without a PFD of appropriate size for each person on board is \$200, plus an additional \$100 for each missing PFD.

### **Sound-Signalling Device**

Paddlers of all sorts need a “sound-signalling device.” The obvious choice is a whistle, but it needs to be “pealess”—so there shouldn't be a little ball of cork bouncing around in the air chamber.

### **Are Canoe and Kayak Lights Required By Law?**

Human-powered craft don't need to have the same red, green and white navigation lights as motorboats, but when paddling between sunset and sunrise or in periods of restricted visibility, such as fog, paddlers must carry a watertight flashlight. Tandem sea kayaks longer than 6 metres must carry six flares.

### **Heave Ho: Buoyant Line**

Paddlers need a buoyant heaving line at least 15 metres long. Purpose-made throw bags are the most practical, but an inexpensive heaving line can be fashioned by fastening a buoyant object to the end of a floating rope. It must be made of one length of rope, not shorter ropes tied together. If paddleboarders and sit-on-top kayakers are wearing PFDs, they aren't required to carry one.

### **Bail(er) Out**

Canoeists and kayakers must pack along a bailer or manual bilge pump. These are not required for a boat that cannot hold enough water to make it capsize.

If paddleboarders and sit-on-top kayakers are wearing PFDs, they aren't required to carry a bailer. What a PFD-less paddleboarder would do with a bailer remains a mystery.

Bailers must be metal or plastic, hold at least 750 mL, and have an opening of 9 cm in diameter. To its credit, Transport Canada encourages you to fashion your own by cutting the bottom off a 4-L plastic jug (but keep the cap screwed on).

### **Navigation Needs**

A magnetic compass is not required if you are paddling within sight of navigation marks.

## **Do you require a license to paddle a canoe or kayak?**

A Pleasure Craft Operator Card is not needed. If you are self-propelled you don't need to pass any course or carry a plastic card. Just revel in your freedom, responsibly.

## **Do the Canoeing and Kayaking Legal Requirements Apply to Everyone?**

Racing boats may not have to carry the equipment listed above if they are engaged in competition, or engaged in formal training and operating under conditions of clear visibility while attended by a safety craft.

For everyone else, failing to have this safety gear on board and easily accessible could earn you a \$200 fine.

So best outfit your craft accordingly, because it's really hard to paddle with handcuffs on.

From:

<https://www.northernontario.travel/paddling/kayak-canoe-and-sup-laws-in-ontario-life-jackets-safety-kits-lights-and-more>

other sources:

<https://www.mec.ca/en/explore/mandatory-paddling-gear>

<https://canadianvesselregistry.ca/transport-canada-canoe-regulations-and-necessary-equipment/>

<https://ruggedoutdoorsguide.com/ontario-canoeing-kayaking-laws/>