

PO Box 14145 Salem, OR 97309-5065  
Media Contacts: Ashley Massey

Phone: (971) 707-2396

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Stand Up Paddleboarding Safety: Wear a Life Jacket, Leash for the Type of Waterway**

The Oregon State Marine Board is urging people who recreate on stand up paddleboards (SUPs) atop moving water (primarily rivers) to always wear a life jacket and never wear a Velcro ankle or leg leash that is designed for general flatwater use or the surf zone.

"There's an emerging trend when we look at the causes for fatalities in recent years, where a person, otherwise well outfitted, died because their leash to the SUP

became entangled in brush or other debris on area rivers," said Brian Paulsen, Boating Safety Program Manager for the Marine Board. "Most ankle leashes used by SUP users are not designed for quick release. If you get it tangled on rocks or downed trees, the leash can make escape nearly impossible."

Most SUPs are equipped with a leash so the paddleboard can stay within reach if the user falls off. On moving water, though, the leash can be deadly. "Quick-release leashes are available and designed specifically for moving water. It's worn around the waist or can be attached to the life jacket. Leashes attached to a jacket are easier for the paddler to grab and deploy," says Paulsen.

Stand up paddleboarding incidents and fatalities were infrequent prior to 2019. Between 2020 to 2024, there were three SUP injuries beyond first aid and 10 fatalities, where either a life jacket wasn't worn, or the person became entangled in an obstruction on moving water without a quick-release leash. Entanglements do happen with life jacket straps as well, however, the chance of survival from drowning is greatly improved. It's important for paddlers to make sure the straps on their life jackets are tucked back into the jacket itself, and the slack is **not** allowed to dangle (as shown).

Life jackets are required to be "readily accessible" on stand up paddleboards. Another thing to keep in mind is that if a jacket is sitting at the bow of the board and the paddler falls off, the board can easily flow out of reach. No board and no life jacket to help the paddler in need. This is why the Marine Board advocates that all paddlers wear their life jackets. There isn't time to put one on in an emergency.



Belt-pack inflatable life jackets are a great option for stand up paddleboarders. It's imperative to know how to properly wear this style of life jacket. The life jacket buckles in the back and inflates from the front, where the deployment tab is located.

"SUPs are very popular, available at big box stores, provide access to local waterways, and are a lot of fun," says Paulsen. "But understanding the basics is crucial, "Paulsen suggested people review [safety information](#) for SUPs and visit the [Marine Board's Paddling page](#) for trip planning, with safety in mind.



There's also a FREE online paddling course in both English and Spanish that covers basic strokes, different environmental conditions to take into consideration, and, of course, safety equipment.

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*The Marine Board is directly funded by boaters in the form of registration, title, and permit fees, as well as through marine fuel taxes. **No lottery, general fund tax dollars or local facility parking fees** support the agency or its programs. Boater-paid fees support the boating public through boating safety services (on-the-water law enforcement, training, and equipment), boating safety education, grants for the construction and maintenance of boating access facilities, and environmental protection programs.*