



**United States Coast Guard**  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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**U.S. Coast Guard 1st District Northeast**  
Contact: 1st District Public Affairs  
Office: [\(617\) 223-8515](tel:6172238515)  
After Hours: [\(617\) 717-9609](tel:6177179609)

# News Release

**Coast Guard focusing on paddle craft safety as 2017 priority**



BOSTON — The First Coast Guard District, spanning from Maine to Northern New Jersey, is promoting greater paddlecraft safety awareness during the 2017 boating season in the Northeast, where paddlecraft fatalities have skyrocketed.

In 2016, the Northeast saw 28 paddler deaths, more than double the national average according to preliminary data.

"Multiple factors affect boating statistics from year to year," said Walt Taylor, the recreational boating safety specialist for the First District. "This year, we are focused on paddlecraft safety, awareness, and enforcement to reduce the number of paddlecraft fatalities this boating season," he said.

Additionally, the Coast Guard is partnering with paddling organizations, retailers, and local authorities to collaborate, and promote paddlecraft safety, as well as provide safety information, found at [www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org).

“This paddlecraft safety initiative is a multi-partnered effort to educate and remind new, casual, and experienced paddlers to assess the risks, envision the consequences, and be properly prepared for what can and sometimes does go wrong,” said Merri Walker, Massachusetts boating law administrator with Massachusetts Environmental Police.

“We want all boaters and paddlers to enjoy their time on the water and, most importantly, return home safely,” said Cmdr. Matthew Barker, director of the First Coast Guard District's Northern Region Auxiliary.

Barker said paddlecraft safety is a critical concern and information is included in all Auxiliary public education courses and numerous events are held to demonstrate the proper handling of canoes and kayaks. Find classes here: <http://a013.uscgaux.info/pe.htm>.

Moreover, paddlers in Massachusetts are required to wear life jackets from Sept. 15-May 15; in Connecticut, Oct. 1-May 31, and in New York, Nov. 1-May 1. All mariners should be aware that most states require children under 12 to be in a life jacket at all times while on the water.

**MEDIA NOTE:** The First Coast Guard District public affairs office is seeking partnerships with local media to share safety information to Northeast paddlers. For interviews, stories, and access to Coast Guard crews and assets, members of the media are encouraged to contact [617-223-8515](tel:617-223-8515).

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