

Statistics tell us that paddle sports such as canoeing, kayaking and rafting, are very safe. But every year, Indiana newspapers carry grim stories of paddlers drowning on streams and lakes around our state. The saddest part is that most of these fatalities are preventable, and many lives could be saved with just a little bit of basic safety knowledge. As you take up this wonderful sport, the **Hoosier Canoe and Kayak Club** hopes you will also take just a few minutes to learn about the major paddling hazards, and what simple steps you can take to avoid them.

**Wear your life jacket.** This is the single most important thing you can do to stay safe on the water. Some ninety percent of drowning victims are found without any type of Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and safety experts estimate more than 70 percent of the victims would have lived if they had simply worn a PFD. It doesn't help to sit on it or to wear it loose. It should be fastened snug and it should float you high. For a small child, the PFD should also be secured with straps running under the legs.

**Beware of cold water.** In all types of boating, the direct cause of drowning is very often an unexpected dunking in cold water. The sudden shock causes the victim to gasp, and take a lung full of water. Or the chill of the water causes hypothermia, which quickly saps the body's strength so victims can't swim to shore or keep themselves afloat if they aren't wearing a PFD. The solution is to dress for the cold. Invest in a wetsuit or drysuit if you intend to paddle water less than 60 degrees. Next best option is layers of synthetic fabrics like fleece and polypro. Natural fibers like cotton won't keep you warm when wet (jeans are about the worst choice for paddling.) Hypothermia is a risk whenever air and water temperatures add up to less than 120 degrees. It's a good idea to carry dry clothes in a waterproof bag, just in case.

**Avoid traps—whether manmade or natural.** Fatal accidents often begin with an encounter with a "strainer"—it can be tree in the water, a branch low to the surface, a log jam or anything that lets water pass through but holds boats and swimmers. Be alert for strainers and give them a wide berth. Lowhead dams are another kind of death trap. Because the drop is small, paddlers sometimes assume they are harmless.

But powerful reversing currents on the downstream side turn them into "drowning machines," almost impossible to escape. Always carry your boat around them (portage) and put in well downstream of them.

**Use good judgement!** The ultimate "life preserver" is that little voice in our heads that warns "This isn't right." Listen to it. You already know better than to paddle "under the influence." Alcohol is a contributing factor in many boating accidents. Stay off of flooded rivers. It may look exciting, but it's very dangerous. There's nowhere to stop and rest, strainers are everywhere as the river rises out of its banks and into the trees. Beneath a calm surface, powerful currents surge and boil in unpredictable ways. Same goes for thunderstorms—water is a fine conductor for lightening. Don't put on if a storm is coming; if one catches you, get off and wait it out. Don't paddle solo. If something goes wrong, there's no one to help you. Experienced paddlers try to gather a group of three at least. It's much safer and it's more fun.



**Hoosier Canoe & Kayak Club**  
[www.hoosiercanoeclub.org](http://www.hoosiercanoeclub.org)

**Join a group and build your skills.** The statewide **Hoosier Canoe and Kayak Club** welcomes new members. It's the oldest and largest organization in Indiana devoted to flatwater, whitewater and sea kayak paddling. For only \$15 per year per family, we offer a chance to make new friends who share your interests, get year-round training and practice with experienced paddlers, and enjoy organized adventure trips in Indiana and beyond.

**Paddle Safe Indiana is a campaign of the Hoosier Canoe & Kayak Club. Check us out online at [www.hoosiercanoeclub.org](http://www.hoosiercanoeclub.org).**

WITH THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS AND PARTNERS:

THE FAMILY OF ETHAN RUNNELS



# Don't Croak on the River



**6  
STEPS  
TO  
STAY  
SAFE**

**PADDLE SAFE  
INDIANA**  
[www.hoosiercanoeclub.org](http://www.hoosiercanoeclub.org)

## Wear a Life Vest

90% of drowning victims didn't.



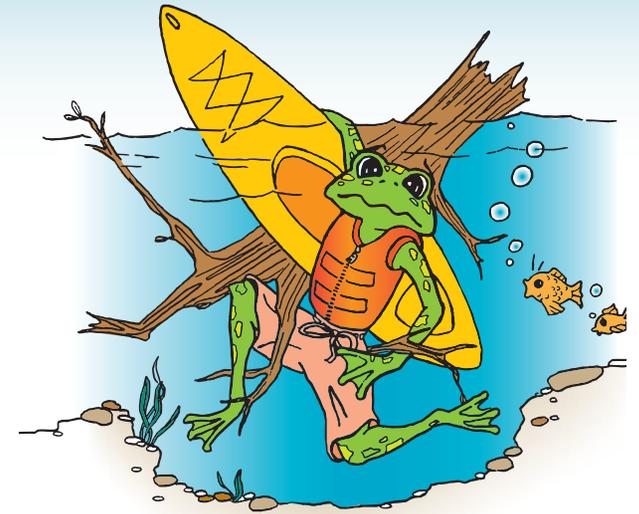
## Dress for Cold Water

A "swim" can shock, stun and kill.  
Pack extra clothes in watertight bag.



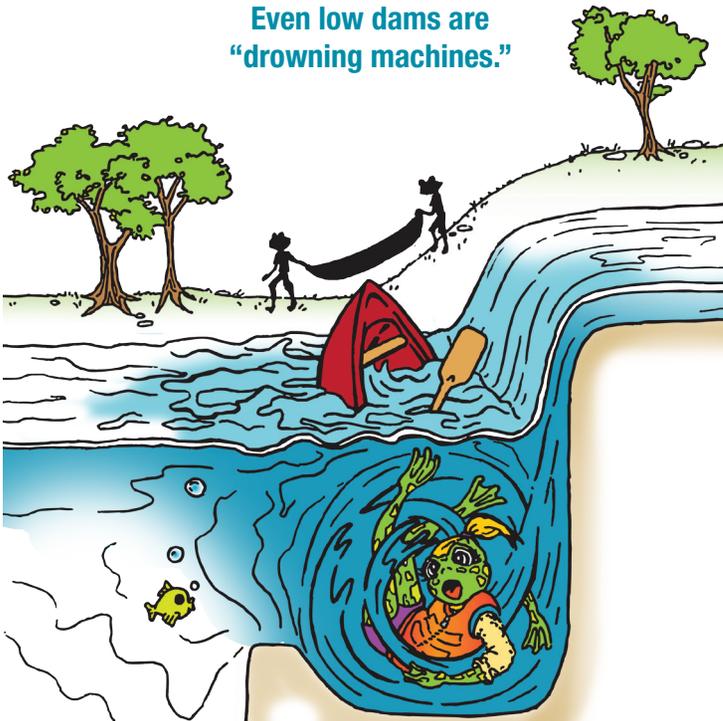
## Avoid "Strainers"

Fallen trees trap boats and bodies.



## Carry Around All Dams

Even low dams are  
"drowning machines."



## Don't Paddle in a Flood

Smooth surfaces conceal dangers.  
Strong currents increase all risks.



## Paddle with Others

Three boat minimum for safety.  
Join a club and learn with friends.

