



PADDLING TO BE SEEN ...

“Staying bright on top” is the focus of new kayak safety initiative being developed by Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) in collaboration with the paddling community.

The initiative encourages recreational kayakers, canoeists and others using low profile watercraft on New Zealand’s lakes, rivers and seas to be safer by making themselves more visible to other boaters.

Jim Lott, MNZ’s Manager of Recreational Boating, says the number of accidents and near misses involving kayakers has prompted the development of the resource, which has been strengthened by input from New Zealand sea kayakers.

Jim says while boaters are required by maritime rules to keep a proper “look out” and maintain appropriate speeds around other water users, there are many factors that can prevent them from seeing kayakers and other craft which sit low in the water.

“Conditions such as choppy water, fog, glare, sun strike, rain, wind in the eyes, salt spray on the windshield, poor vision or a combination of any of these can affect a boater’s ability to spot a small craft in the water.”

“However, there is a lot that kayakers and others using similar craft can do to dramatically improve their visibility – and therefore their own safety – when sharing the water with others.”

MNZ Safety Auditor Colin Sonneveld says the first step in the process is for kayakers to assess their current equipment, clothing and behaviour on the water to get an idea of how easy or hard it is for others to see them.

Colin says the best way for kayakers to gauge this is by giving themselves a “**visibility impact score**” or **VIS**. The higher the VIS rating, the higher the likelihood you will be visible to other boaters.



MNZ safe boating adviser, Ian Calhaem, shows how to “stay bright on top”.

“The trick to being safe is being seen – and paddling smarter by using the right combination of colour, contrast and movement to maximise your visibility.

“Because sunlight levels change during the day, having a range of bright, contrasting colours on your clothing and equipment means that different parts of you will still be visible, even as the light fades.

“The most visible colours on the water are day glow or fluorescent orange and yellow, as they contrast against all other naturally occurring colours and shades,” says Colin. “This contrast is another key component in increasing your VIS potential.

“You can also maximise your VIS potential by displaying contrasting colours from the top down. The higher you can create the colour flow the further you can be seen.”

See the reverse side for more detailed “Kayak visibility tips”.

KAYAK VISIBILITY TIPS

Use your head

As your head is your highest point, make it as bright as is possible. Day glow orange or yellow hats are excellent VIS attractants.

Blazing paddles

Motion is another important visibility tool. Because your blades are in constant motion while paddling, you can increase your visibility by using reflective tape on blades or shafts, combined with strips of day glow tape. This combination will allow your paddle to catch and reflect sunlight as well as create flashes of day glow.

Dress to impress

Wearing a day-glow orange or yellow paddle jacket or over-shirt offers the highest VIS potential. If your torso is not covered in day glow, consider having a bright coloured paddle jacket which is a different colour to your kayak, personal flotation device (PFD) and paddle blades.

Bright is best

Choose a PFD in a bright colour. To maximise your VIS potential, consider having a PFD that is a different colour to your kayak, paddle blades and paddling jacket. Contrast the colours for maximum affect.

Fly the flag

Day glow orange and yellow chopper flags provide a permanent bright flash at the same height as the rotational arc of your paddle blades. Consider always using a flag if you are fishing from a kayak in a stationary position, as you don't have the additional visibility of your moving paddle blades.

Choose a colourful craft

Choose a kayak in a bright contrasting colour. The highest VIS potential is achieved when your boat contrasts to the sea and surrounding back drops. To increase your kayak's visibility, consider adding flashes of day glow or reflective tape. Multi-coloured bright kayaks provide increased contrast.

Be bright at night

Maritime rules require that as a **minimum**, kayakers must carry a torch to prevent collision. However, holding a torch may prevent you from paddling effectively and therefore being seen!

Wearing a head torch allows your arms to be free to paddle. In addition, mounting an all-round white light (or a red, green and white

sector light) on your rear deck above head-height means you will be visible from all directions.

Stick together

If travelling in a group, particularly at night, it is recommended that kayakers carry two light sources, such as a head torch and an all-round white light.

When paddling in a tight pod, if the rear paddler has their all-round light turned on, the group will be visible from behind and other members will not be blinded. The lead kayaker should also have their head torch on and shining forward, which won't affect others' night vision. All paddlers should then only need to use their lights when there is approaching traffic. Don't use flashing strobe lights unless in an emergency.

Attaching reflective tape or strips to your kayak, paddle and clothing will maximise your VIS potential at night. Shining your torch across the strips can also help you to be seen.

Remember the radio

If you are paddling in an area and can see other larger boats that may not be able to see you, remember that many of them will have a VHF radio and be listening on Channel 16. A very brief message to all craft in the area stating you are on the water can alert others to your presence.

And don't forget to ...

- lodge a trip intentions form with a reliable person
- carry **two forms of communication**, eg VHF radio, cellphone, flares
- ensure that communication devices are carried in waterproof bag or container
- carry them on you, in case you are separated from your kayak
- if you're going inland to rivers where there is no cellphone or VHF radio coverage, take a 406MHz PLB (personal locator beacon)
- dress for the conditions – **stay on top, stay warm, be found!**

More information

- Check out our website: www.maritimenz.govt.nz
- Subscribe to our quarterly newsletters (*Safe Cleans Seas* – news from Maritime New Zealand; *Lookout!* – lessons to be learnt from accidents at sea) by emailing: publications@maritimenz.govt.nz