Safety Activity Checkpoints (SACs)

Stand-Up Paddleboarding (SUP)

ACTIVITY	DAISY	BROWNIE	JUNIOR	CADETTE	SENIOR	AMBASSADOR	Is Prior Council Approval Required?	Is Activity Training, Certification, or Verified Experience Required?
Stand-Up Paddleboarding			*	C	S	A	Yes	Yes

*Juniors may paddle only on flat water and must stay within swimming distance of shore.

Chill or thrill—it's up to you! Stand-up paddleboarding is easy to learn and tons of fun, with challenging advanced options like racing, surfing, whitewater, or even yoga on the water.

General Checkpoints

Refer to the Safety Standards for general standards about supervision, transportation, first aid, emergency action plans, and more, as well as reminders about inclusion and accessibility considerations.

Activity-Specific Checkpoints for Paddleboarding

Follow these basic reminders for each phase of planning. Check off items as you complete them, making sure to consider each sub-bullet.

Decision-Making Phase

☐ **Find a safe place to paddleboard.**

- Nearly any body of water is suitable for SUP with the right instruction, equipment, and experience. Start on flat water with little to no current. Progress to more advanced conditions, such as rivers or surf.
- **Paddling.com** and **American Whitewater** have interactive maps of paddling locations.
- A soft bottom (such as sand or mud) is generally best. Avoid areas with sharp rocks or coral, as falls are inevitable.

Learn More:

- Urge all participants to take ACA's free **online paddlesports safety course**.
- Discover **ACA's guidance on when (and when not) to wear life jackets and leashes** when paddleboarding.

- Paddling is not permitted farther than 1 mile from the nearest shore. Avoid shipping lanes.
- Note: The U.S. Coast Guard considers SUPs to be vessels when they are used outside of designated swim areas or ocean surfing zones. Follow all regulations about life jackets, sound devices, lights, etc.

☐ **Identify an expert.**

- Arrange for instruction by an adult with experience teaching and supervising paddleboarding for the ages involved.
- Engage a certified instructor with training suited to your location and conditions from:
  - **American Canoe Association** (ACA)—various certification levels
  - **National Surf/SUP Schools & Instructors Association**
  - Girl Scouts Small Craft Safety Course (with SUP module)
  - American Red Cross Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module (for flat water, near shore only)
  - Documented experience per your council's guidelines

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- Follow the instructor–student ratio, following the instructor's certification, with a maximum of five learners per instructor. An ACA instructor with a qualified assistant may supervise up to ten learners.
- Ensure instructors have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions at the paddling location.

Planning and Preparation Phase

☐ **Be clear on gear.**

- Review Gear for Stand-Up Paddleboarding (SUP) at the end of this section.
- Ask your instructor or outfitter what items are provided.
- Communicate early with participants and families about what the group leader or outfitter will supply and what individuals need to bring themselves

☐ **Line up first aid.**

- Ensure that at least one adult has First Aid/CPR/AED training.
- For locations more than 30 minutes from emergency medical services, recruit a Wilderness First Aider or Wilderness First Responder. Identify the closest emergency transport and facilities.
- Bring a first aid kit in a waterproof container.

☐ **Assess swimming ability.** Strong swimming skills are important for paddlers' safety and confidence. A swim assessment is highly recommended to evaluate participant readiness.

- Advance swim assessments are recommended to avoid disappointment.
- Same-day assessments may be conducted if necessary.
- If swim assessments are not feasible, assume all participants are non-swimmers.
- Very competent swimming ability is required for SUP surfing and river SUP due to stronger currents and waves.

Day of the Activity

☐ **Check the weather.**

- Consult your instructor; postpone or cancel if conditions are unsuitable for your group's skill level.
- Never SUP during a storm.
- Monitor wave conditions, as surf height and form change daily. Use resources like **Wannasurf.com** and **Surfline.com** for live updates.
- Check water quality reports on **Surfrider's interactive map**, especially after rainfall.
- Inspect the area upon arrival for potential weather-related hazards.

☐ **Ensure everyone learns and practices the basics.**

- Proper body position and balancing on the board
- Launching and landing techniques
- Popping up from kneeling to a standing position
- Propelling and steering the board with effective strokes
- Maneuvering through waves and wakes
- Falling safely away from the board during a wipeout, and how to self-rescue
- In surf, navigating around the break, and recognizing and managing rip currents
- Marine life precautions, such as shuffling feet to avoid stingrays
- Signaling for help
- Any site-specific instructions

☐ **Inspect the area upon arrival.**

- Point out and avoid hazards such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines.
- Surf zones, rapids, and standing waves must be avoided unless part of a planned whitewater experience.

☐ **Follow paddling right of way rules.**

- Yield to swimmers and less maneuverable watercraft.
- When traveling in the same general direction, the paddler on the left yields to the one on the right.
- When approaching head-on, both paddlers steer to the right.
- In narrow channels, keep to the right and yield to larger vessels.
- In surf zones, the person closest to the wave peak has priority; avoid cutting others off.
- Maintain control of your board to avoid collisions.

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☐ **Prepare for emergencies.**
- Discuss emergency action plans with your instructor.
- Know who to contact and how to call for help.
- Be aware of your location to communicate effectively with authorities.

Stand-Up Paddleboarding Trips: Additional Considerations

Stand-up paddleboarding trips are longer day or overnight excursions. Plan trips only after progressive skill-building experiences. Follow these additional tips for a safe and satisfying experience.

☐ **File a float plan for any trip.**
- Provide a reliable adult with information about your boat(s) and the people aboard.
- This fillable plan includes steps for your contact to take if they are concerned about your safety.

☐ **Ensure basic skills.**
- Participants must have the skill and stamina to finish the trip, even if headwinds or other challenges arise.
- Participants must learn how to cross busy channels, if necessary. Generally, cross at a 90-degree angle to channel traffic.
- Participants must learn universal signals.

☐ **Use a professional guide with the additional training needed** for the trip type. Guiding on river, whitewater, coastal, touring, and open water (ocean) trips are advanced certifications.

☐ **Stick together.**
- Assign a lead paddler to set a pace that meets the group's needs.
- Assign a strong "sweep" paddler to support and encourage anyone who falls behind.
- Keep boards close enough together so that a group decision can be made if wind or water conditions change.

☐ **Plan a safe route.**
- Be aware of possible changes in water level due to tides or dam releases, and how these may impact your route.
- Avoid hazards such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines. Rapids must be avoided unless part of a planned whitewater route.

☐ **See the additional gear needed for trips** under Gear for Stand-Up Paddleboarding. Consult your guide about what else may be needed.

Gear for Stand-Up Paddleboarding

Make sure Girl Scouts have everything they need for a safe and successful stand-up paddleboarding experience.

Essential equipment

- Boards suited to participants' skill level and conditions; stable, easy-to-paddle boards are best for beginners.
- Properly sized paddle
- Fins for directional control
- Coiled ankle leash for board security
  - Straight leash for SUP surfing
  - Quick-release leash for river SUP
- Pump, if using inflatable SUPs

Safety gear

- Coast Guard-approved life jacket, properly sized and fitted for each person (required). Exception: life jackets are not worn when SUP surfing. Review this **ACA video** for explanation.
- Rescue whistle
- Throwable personal flotation device (Type IV cushion, ring buoy, or equivalent) available for each group on the water
- Tow line and/or throw bag for rescues (carried by the instructor)
- For river SUP:
  - Helmets for Class II or higher rapids
  - Chest, arm, and leg protection recommended

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Clothing and footwear

- Layered, non-cotton clothing (rash guards are ideal)
- Water shoes, neoprene booties, or non-slip sport sandals with a heel strap (no flip-flops)
- Wetsuit or neoprene top and shorts if the water temperature is below 65°F
- Paddling gloves for comfort and grip

Gear for trips

Consult your expert about what to bring in addition to the gear listed above. They may recommend items such as:

- Navigation items, such as GPS or compass
- Communication equipment, such as two-way, satellite, or weather/VHF radios
- Dry bags—and a way to secure them—to carry food, water, first aid kit, etc.

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