

Safety Activity Checkpoint

Standup Paddle Boarding (SUP)

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required
First-Aider Required

Council Approval: Required

Activity Permitted For: J C S A



Not Permitted For: Daisies and Brownies

About Standup Paddle Boarding

While standing, paddlers propel standup paddleboards (SUPs) across the water with long-handled paddles. Paddling is a full-body sport, which uses core muscles and develops excellent balance and coordination. With instruction, beginners can quickly learn to paddle on flat-water lakes and bays. Experienced paddlers can tackle ocean surf or rivers with a certified instructor's guidance.

With the right instruction, equipment, and preparation, almost any body of water is suitable for SUP. Start with flat water with little or no current, and progress to more advanced conditions like rivers or oceans.

The U.S. Coast Guard considers SUPs as vessels when they are used outside of designated swim areas or ocean surfing zones. Therefore, federal regulations about life jackets, sound devices, and lights apply.

Learn More:

- Interactive maps of places to go: [Paddling.com](https://www.paddling.com) and [American Whitewater](https://www.americanwhitewater.org)
- For river paddling: [International Scale of River Difficulty](https://www.internationalcanoeing.com)
- About canoeing, kayaking, and SUP: [American Canoe Association](https://www.americancanoe.org)

- [Stand Up Paddle World magazine](#)

Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. For resources and information on accessible sport and adventure activities, visit [Move United](#).

Additional Resources:

- See [Abilities.com](#) and [Dream Adaptive](#) to find out about inclusion and adaptive equipment for paddlers.

Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as the proper equipment, prior experiences, and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Standard Safety Guidelines. Refer to the "Standard Safety Guidelines" in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) which apply to all Girl Scout gatherings and activities. When the adult-to-girl ratio, or other safety parameters, are stricter for a specific activity than in the Standard Safety Guidelines, always follow the stricter parameters in the activity chapter.

COVID-19 Guidelines. Review the "Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts" section in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the "Standard Safety Guidelines" section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal's specific COVID-19 guidance](#). When applicable, always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Ensure participants are able to swim and are comfortable in the water. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Consult with parents/guardians about girls' swim abilities before the event. See the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoint](#) for water-abilities testing samples, or ask your instructor for guidelines. Only strong swimmers are approved for whitewater canoeing. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)] SUP paddlers must be strong swimmers.

Ensure all paddlers wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears.

Practice recovery procedures. The instructor demonstrates self-recovery and righting techniques. Girls learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent them from becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water (likely with SUP).

Verifying instructor or guides' knowledge and experience:

- The skill level of the adults must be higher than the difficulty of the intended activity.
- The instructor or guide must be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions.
- The instructor or guide needs to review site-specific emergency techniques. For example, when paddling in shallow water, the instructor should remind girls how to fall from their boards.

- The lead instructor or guide needs to have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location being used.
- At least one adult instructor or guide should be currently certified by the American Canoe Association, completes Girl Scouts small craft safety training certification, or other sponsoring organization approved by GSNorCal. Certifications must be appropriate for the activity.

Check lifeguard qualifications. For lifeguards overseeing SUP, ensure they have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment for the body of water being used.

Arrange for watchers/helpers. An adult watcher or skilled helper is required for some group sizes. See the [Paddling and Rowing Sports--Master Progression Chart](#). This person should have basic skills in the activity, and support the group by reinforcing instructions, watching for possible emergencies, and helping with rescues if needed. Basic water rescue, small craft safety, or similar training is the preferred preparation. Consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications. For more information on watcher-to-girl ratios, see the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoint](#).

Select a safe site. Do not paddle in unknown areas; know the locations of all shipping channels. Paddling is not permitted farther than one mile from the nearest shore. Make sure of the following:

- The launching area is free of glass and debris and has a gentle slope and good footing. Rocks should be avoided.
- Busy channels are avoided when possible and crossed carefully, when necessary, at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic.
- Surf zones and areas with standing waves are avoided, except as part of planned ocean/surf or whitewater paddling.
- On long passages, boards are close enough together so that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.
- You are aware of possible changes in water level, due to tides or dam releases, and how these affect water conditions.
- 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.

Research water conditions. Select the right boards for participant skill level and conditions.

Know universal signals. Whistle and visual signals are used to pass messages or call for help. Learn them at [Paddling.com](#).

Prepare for emergencies. Pack a waterproof first-aid kit if you will be away from shore. Follow other guidelines in [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints 2023-2024](#). See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)]

File a float plan. If participating in a long-distance trip, file a float plan with a reliable person who will notify authorities should your group not return on time.

Get a weather and wind report. Check [Weather.com](#) or other reliable weather sources, including the “boat and beach” forecast, which covers wind speed, water temperature, and wave height. Be prepared with a backup plan or postpone the activity if weather prevents the outing.

Review what to do in a storm. If thunder is heard, or lightning seen, get everyone off the water immediately. Do not return until at least 30 minutes have passed since the last evidence of the storm. If you cannot get to shore, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions, head into the wind at a 45-degree angle, and stay low.

Review self-rescue techniques. Make sure that each person can get back on his or her board. When paddling in cold water, also review cold-water survival techniques and treatment for hypothermia.

Use the buddy system. Instruct girls to stay within sight of at least one other board.

Transport paddle boards safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for paddleboards. Secure them with two lines across the top (one at each end), and with lines at the bow and the stern. Drivers must have prior experience hauling trailers.

Report accidents. Notify marine law enforcement and GSNorCal. Fill out GSNorCal's [Accident-Injury Report](#).

Safety Gear

Some of the gear you will need depends on the type of paddling or on the water conditions. Check with your instructor or guide.

- A U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket worn at all times while paddling (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Paddle board sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water
- Paddles the appropriate size and style for the activity and person using them (a good rule of thumb is 10 inches higher than the paddler's height; keep extras on hand)
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle
- Rescue gear appropriate for conditions, such as throw bag or throw line or waist-mounted tow system
- Leash to keep board close in case paddler falls off (no leashes in rivers, to avoid entrapment)
- Helmet, chest protector, arm and leg protection for whitewater standup paddle boarding (inflatable board recommended)
- Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which you will paddle.

Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Standup Paddle Boarding (SUP)

Standup Paddle Boarding is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form](#) to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
 - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California, have a current background check, completed the troop chaperone course and troop driver course (if transporting girls), and completed the [California State Mandated Reporter Training](#). Troop Leaders can find this information in their [Volunteer Toolkit](#).
 - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
 - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your [Volunteer Learning Portal](#) in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
 - The **Trip & Outdoor Advisor Course** is required for all overnight and [high-adventure activities](#).
 - The [Camp Out course](#) is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.
 - The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.

- The **Girl Scout Small Craft Safety Training** is required before you take girls on a small craft water adventure.
- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops/groups must select a high-adventure vendor from the [High-Adventure Approved Vendor List](#), which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the council's and volunteer's legal interests.
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