



Surface Water Rescue

Nonswimming assists and rescues

Following the idea that you want to minimize your own risk, when possible use a rescue that allows you to stay out of the water and to avoid direct contact with the victim. Usually, this means extending something, throwing something, or taking a boat or other watercraft to the victim.

You can extend almost anything that will reach the victim and allow you to pull him to safety. A boat hook, paddle or even clothing can work. If you're close enough and have nothing else handy to extend, you can use your arm, but be certain you won't get pulled into the water. Preferably, extend something you can release easily if you start to get pulled in.

If the victim is beyond reach but still fairly close, throw something to provide flotation, preferably with a line attached so you can pull the diver to safety, and so you can rethrow the object if you miss. Most boats have personal flotation devices with line kept ready for this, but almost anything that floats and is throwable will work. For example, you can use a gear bag stuffed with a couple of wet suits, an empty bottle or beverage cooler, or an inflated BCD jacket without tank.

When throwing, keep in mind the effect wind and current may have on where the float goes. Try to throw over and past the victim; if you over throw, you can pull the float to him with the line, but if you under throw, you'll have to reel the line in and throw again. After the victim has the float, pull him in slowly. If you pull too hard, you may yank the float out of his grasp and have to throw it again.

If you have some form of flotation, throw it even if the victim appears too tired, weak or panicked to use it. The victim may not grab it, but an in water rescuer may use it.

Use some sort of watercraft, such as a boat, paddleboard or jet ski as your third nonswimming option with a victim that is too far to reach or throw to. Be cautious of others in the water, especially when using a motor driven craft; if feasible, paddle or row to the victim. Approach from down wind so the wind doesn't blow the craft over the victim. When using an unstable craft like a canoe, approach bow or stern to the victim to avoid having him accidentally capsize you by climbing aboard.

Source: PADI Rescue Diver Manual



When possible, your first choice for assisting a victim should be to do so without getting in the water yourself, such as by throwing a float and line to the diver.

Most water rescue line is made of polypropylene which will float in the water. Throw-bags can be thrown overhead, side arm, or under-hand. According to the PA Fish & Boat Commission, "once the rescuer has successfully thrown the line to the victim, he/she should have a wide stance for support. It is important to have the line on the down stream side of the rescuer when performing a (rescue)... The rescuer should **never** attach himself/herself to the line or tie the line to a stationery object such as a tree.

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SEE YOU ON THE SWATTIE! TIPS

Don't put lives at risk. **Wear your life vest!**

Knowing how to read a river will save you energy and increase your enjoyment on the trip. The challenge for the canoeist is to find the deeper (darker water) channels. On a river bend, the water moves faster and is deepest on the outside of a curve. Choose these channels to reduce the number of times you "beach" your boat.

While many bends are clear of debris, fallen trees and brush (strainers) also pile up on outside curves. Strainers trap solid objects such as overturned boats and people, but allow water to pass through. Always avoid getting swept into the bank or into a strainer. The **order of rescue is people, boats, then gear.**

Also, water at the base of a dam creates a hydraulic that can pull you in both tipping and trapping a boat and any occupants. Because they don't look dangerous, many drownings occur at low-head dams. Avoid dams! Listen to your safety guides.

- 1) It's important that we share the water rights to the Swattie with others. Display courtesy and respect to landowners, other boaters, and anglers.
- 2) No alcohol!
- 3) Watch for overhanging trees, brush piles, submerged logs, and rocks that could tip you.
- 4) Don't stand in your canoe. Keep your weight low.
- 5) Put your heavier, and hopefully more experienced canoeist in the rear seat.
- 6) To signal the canoes behind you, always expose the flat side of your paddle and:
 - a. Extend your paddle to the left to indicate a "left turn."
 - b. Extend your paddle to the right to indicate a "right turn."
 - c. Hold your paddle horizontally overhead to signal a stop.
 - d. For help, hold the handle and move the paddle in a circular motion overhead. If you lose your paddles, swing just about anything (except your partner) overhead.
- 7) Upstream "V's" suggest submerged rocks. Downstream "V's" suggest gaps/paths between rocks.
- 8) To steer left, paddle hard on the right and/or the rear person can drag his paddle on the left. To go right, do the opposite.

So you won't be pinned between the canoe and a rock or tree if you capsize, stay on the upstream side of your canoe. Try to hold onto your boat. Otherwise, to avoid hitting your head on rocks and trees, float on your back, feet pointing downstream. Hand paddle to safety.

Tie gear to craft to avoid loss if capsized. Have fun.