

# Water Sports Foundation Applauds DICK'S Sporting Goods Paddling Safety Initiative

*Retailer joins nonprofits and state agencies to promote kayaking and paddleboarding safety*

ORLANDO, FL, UNITED STATES, October 22, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Water Sports Foundation](#), a recreational boating safety advocacy group, is coordinating a paddling safety effort including state agencies, nonprofits and retailer DICK'S Sporting Goods. The initiative seeks to engage large sporting goods chains and warehouse stores in a coordinated effort to make kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding safer for all.



When practiced safely, kayaking is an excellent way to get exercise and enjoy the outdoors, but recent Coast Guard data show an upward trend in casualties

According to U.S. Coast Guard data, beginners account for a disproportionate share of paddling fatalities. An examination of the agency's [Recreational Boating Safety Statistics](#) reveals that nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of those who died in paddling accidents in 2022 had less than 100 hours experience in the activity, and well over one-third (39.7 percent) had less than 10 hours experience. Because a majority of new paddlers purchase their kayaks and paddleboards from large retail chains, the Water Sports Foundation (WSF) believes these companies are essential partners in national paddling safety efforts.

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*Jim Emmons*

One large retailer is stepping up to make a difference.

DICK'S Sporting Goods invited the WSF, the Pennsylvania Boat and Fish Commission (PFBC) and the American Canoe Association to participate in its annual Outdoor University manager training event in June.

Will Nowell, DICK'S Learning Portfolio Architect, addressed more than 300 boating safety specialists at the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) conference last month in New Orleans. Nowell, who oversees training curricula for DICK'S Sporting Goods employees, shared details of measures the company has adopted to bring safety awareness to new paddlesports participants.

The NASBLA conference attracts recreational boating safety specialists from across the United States, including state boating law administrators, education coordinators, the U.S. Coast Guard and non-profits such as the WSF. Nowell participated in a panel discussion, where he described DICK'S new paddlesports safety initiatives and the value they bring to the company and its customers.

The Water Sports Foundation's executive director, Jim Emmons said, "DICK'S Sporting Goods is leading the country in large non-specialty retailer paddlesports safety promotion. No other retailer has adopted safety suggestions like DICK'S Sporting Goods has. Since May 2024, DICK'S has implemented a number of significant safety initiatives, including paddlesports training for employees and promoting paddling safety courses to customers."

"We know that new paddlers account for the majority of accidents, and that most new paddlers get their first kayak or paddleboard from large sporting good chains and warehouse stores. The work DICK'S Sporting Goods is doing to educate their customers about safer paddling, such as the requirement to have a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket, will make paddling safer," Emmons said. "We urge other large retailers to adopt similar safety promotions."

In June, the U.S. Coast Guard released 2023 accident statistics [link: <https://www.watersportsfoundation.com/recreational-boating-statistics-2023/>] showing that while powerboating deaths were down 11 percent from the previous year, fatalities involving human-powered watercraft actually increased by 5 percent – accounting for nearly one-third (32.5 percent) of all U.S. boating fatalities.

Emmons said, "In the past several years, paddlesports incidents have been an increasing concern for boating safety advocates and the latest Coast Guard statistics underscore the need to act now. It's tragic when someone buys a kayak to enjoy the outdoors, and don't return home to their loved ones because they lack basic paddling safety knowledge. Most casualties could have



A sweepstakes offer to win a gift card at the Dick's Sporting Goods U event ensured the Water Sports Foundation effectively shared its safety message with store manager attendees. Photo: WSF

been prevented through education and better outreach.”

Many boating safety advocates blame the increase in paddling-related fatalities on the huge participation spikes in kayaking and stand up paddleboarding since the COVID19 pandemic. New vessel sales jumped to all-time highs, at a time when paddling clubs and classes were unavailable.

The Water Sports Foundation has been a leading proponent of paddlesports safety since 2016, when it launched its Increasing Awareness of Paddlesports Safety project with support from the U.S. Coast Guard. The project’s goal is to make paddlers more aware of recreational paddling safety measures, such as always wearing a Coast Guard approved life jacket and taking a paddler education course.

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