



# Safety Guidelines

## Swift Water Paddling

### Marine Safety



#### Recommended safety equipment



**Boat and paddle:** Specifically designed for white water conditions. Familiar to the user, cockpit easily exited if capsized. Securely fitted flotation. Sturdy paddle without leash.



**Lifejacket (PFD 2):** Correctly sized and fitted and in good repair, worn over all other clothing while on or near moving water.



**Safety whistle:** Plastic pea-less design attached to the lifejacket with a short lanyard. Used to attract attention



**Paddling helmet:** Securely fitted, approved paddling design, worn at all times while paddling on moving water



**Clothing:** Wool or polypro garments offer good insulation from cold water. A windproof jacket and adequate footwear will protect from wind chill.



**Mobile phone:** Carry fully charged on your person in a watertight pouch/ container. Consider saving safety numbers on speed dial.



**Food and drink:** Energy snacks, chocolate bars, water and a flask of hot drink. No alcohol.



**Throw rope:** 15 metres of floating rope without knots or loops, in a throw bag, available at most paddle sport retailers.

#### Paddling safety

**Paddling group:** Never paddle alone. Form small, mutually supportive paddling groups. Keep each other in sight without overcrowding. Keep sight of the person behind, stopping if necessary. Place less skilled paddlers in the middle of the group. Do regular head counts, never leave anyone behind.

**Leader:** Sets the pace and keeps the group together. Stop and look for options by walking along the bank if a safe route isn't obvious. If in doubt; don't!

**Signals:** Have an agreed system of signalling that the group understands: stop; go left; go right; all clear; and need help.

#### Contact details

##### Department of Transport

Email: [marine.safety@transport.wa.gov.au](mailto:marine.safety@transport.wa.gov.au)  
Website: [www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine)  
**Marine Safety Hotline: 1300 863 308**

##### Boating Weather Forecast

Boating Weather: 1900 955 350  
Website: [www.bom.gov.au/wa/flood](http://www.bom.gov.au/wa/flood)

##### Department of Parks and Wildlife

Website: [www.dpaw.wa.gov.au](http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au)

##### Canoeing Western Australia

[www.wa.canoe.org.au](http://www.wa.canoe.org.au)



Join us at  
[facebook.com/MarineSafetyWA](https://facebook.com/MarineSafetyWA)

**YOU'RE THE SKIPPER  
YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE**



## Swift water paddling

The term 'swift water' or 'white water' is used to describe the state of a river after heavy rains or a dam release. In WA, this flood state doesn't occur very often and a sudden deluge can often carry fallen trees and branches with it, causing dangerous obstacles to form. Existing foliage growth and rocks can form additional obstacles. Together with fast, turbulent water waves, rapids and eddies form in the river that are exciting and challenge even experienced paddlers.

This brochure promotes safe paddling practices and provides guidelines to foster safety in a swift water environment.

## Gain Experience

- Develop paddling skills, knowledge and experience through a local paddling club or training provider.
- Be very familiar with swift water features, avoidance techniques and basic rescue skills.
- Ensure your group has adequate skills, knowledge and equipment to complete the trip safely.

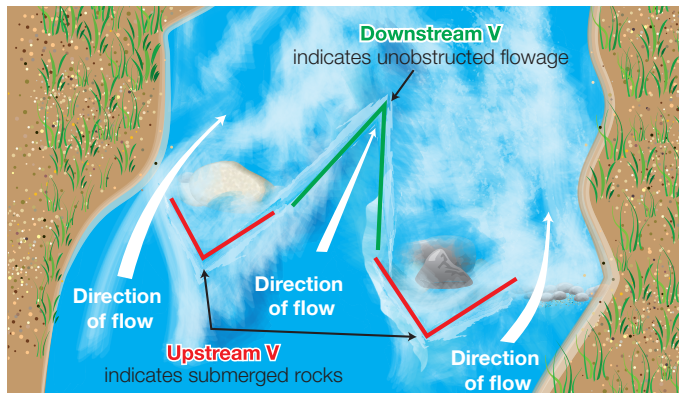
## Before getting on the river

- Check the level and condition of the river. In flood it will be much faster and more dangerous. Contact the local Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW) office if in doubt.
- Do not attempt rivers or rapids that are beyond your fitness and paddling ability. If in doubt, stay out!
- Let someone know where you are going and what time to expect you back.

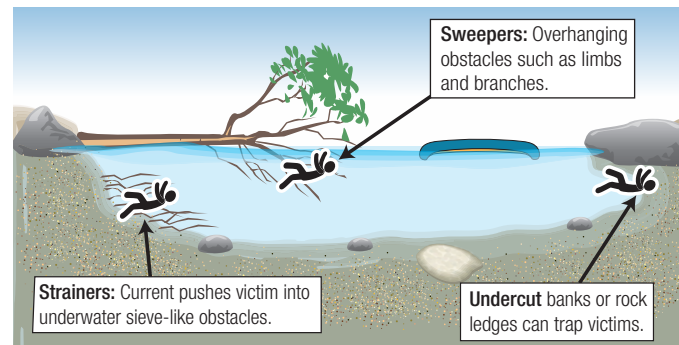
## Swift water feature recognition

**Downstream 'V':** Generally the easiest way through a rapid.

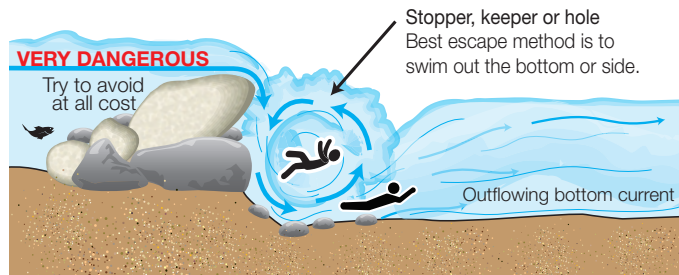
**Upstream 'V':** Indicates a shallow hazard to avoid.



**Sweepers and strainers and undercuts:** Avoid submerged or floating logs/branches/bushes that will trap the unwary paddler.



**Stopper/keeper/hole:** Avoid these recirculating washing machines.



## Survival in the water

- If you end up swimming in fast moving water, roll onto your back, feet together at the surface (pointing downstream), knees bent, allowing you to push off from rocks etc.
- Extend your arms 90 degrees for support.
- To avoid a foot entrapment do not put your feet down until you are in still, shallow water, then swim your way to the bank.
- If you get swept towards a strainer, roll onto your front and swim fast, with your feet at the surface and launch yourself completely over the obstacle.

## Top 10 tips for a swift water paddler

1. Join a paddling club or find a training provider to teach you the correct paddling technique and safety skills required.
2. Know your own limitations and capabilities and don't attempt environments beyond them.
3. Let someone know before you go and when you return.
4. Check your craft and equipment are suitable for the conditions and in good repair.
5. Dress for cold conditions, hypothermia can set in very quickly.
6. Carry some energy bars and a flask of hot drink.
7. Wear a lifejacket and helmet to save your life.
8. Never paddle alone, minimum of three in a group.
9. Start the trip early in the day to avoid low light conditions.
10. If in doubt; don't!