



MARINE SAFETY AND SECURITY INFORMATION BULLETIN (MSIB) 13-03

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U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Coast Guard Sector San Francisco

Boardsport and Kayak Safety in the San Francisco Bay Area

This MSIB relays important safety considerations regarding the growing number of wind and human powered recreational vessels operating on San Francisco Bay. As these sports become more popular, the Coast Guard has seen a rising trend in the number of individuals requiring assistance. Last year alone, the Coast Guard and local partner agencies responded to over 250 search and rescue cases involving boardsports and kayakers. Many of these cases could have been avoided by adherence to simple safety guidelines and an understanding of the dynamic forces and diverse users in the Bay.

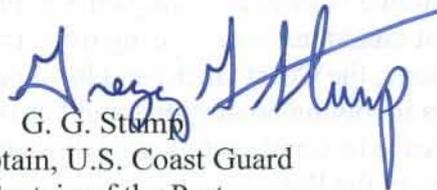
Boardsport-related search and rescue cases are often strandings on the shoreline, on the Bay, or at sea resulting from equipment failures, fatigue, injuries, strong currents and/or loss of wind. Each individual boater is responsible for his or her own safety and preparedness for unexpected emergencies. The Coast Guard strongly urges recreational boaters and watersports enthusiasts to always wear personal flotation devices (PFDs), carry a hand held VHF radio and flares in case of emergency, mark your equipment with reflective tape to improve visibility in the event of a night time search, and notify someone you trust of where you are going and when you plan to return. Additionally, boardsport enthusiasts and kayakers should be particularly mindful of prevailing and forecasted winds, tides and currents, and their potential impacts on your ability to safely return to shore. Equipment such as kayaks, paddles, boards, kites and windsurf sails should always be marked with your name and telephone number so the Coast Guard can contact you if the gear is found adrift. This prevents unnecessarily searching for you if you are safely on shore, a practice which puts emergency responders at risk, strains limited search and rescue resources, and potentially endangers the lives of others who are actually in distress. These small, simple actions can improve safety for all users on the Bay, and may ultimately save your life in unexpected circumstances.

The San Francisco Bay is also the gateway to seven busy commercial ports frequented by large, deep draft vessels (such as container ships, oil tankers, cargo ships and cruise ships), tugs and barges, ferries, fishing vessels, and tour boats. Thousands of people recreate on the Bay using powerboats, sailboats, sailboards, kiteboards, stand-up paddle boards, kayaks, and other craft. The Coast Guard is committed to maintaining a safe and accessible waterway for the diverse mix of users on San Francisco Bay.

Maneuvering small, human and wind powered craft in close proximity to large commercial vessels can present significant safety and navigational hazards. The Coast Guard frequently responds to incidents involving hazardous interactions between recreational users and large commercial vessels transiting shipping lanes and navigation channels, or approaching or departing berth. Recreational craft such as kiteboards, stand-up paddle boards, windsurf boards, sailboards and kayaks are considered "vessels" for regulatory purposes when operating beyond

the narrow limits of a swimming, surfing or bathing area. As such, these craft must comply with Rule 9 of the Inland Navigation Rules (33 U.S.C. 2009) which defines the requirements for vessels navigating in the vicinity of narrow channels or fairways. While Rule 9 is in effect, Rule 18 – which prescribes responsibilities between vessels – does not apply. **This means that all sailing vessels and any other vessels less than 20 meters in length do not have right of way over deep draft vessels in the San Francisco Bay.**

All recreational users should exhibit caution while operating in vicinity of narrow, deep-water channels and fairways. Vessel masters, pilots and operators are encouraged to report incidents that merit investigation. Reports can be made to the Vessel Traffic Center via VHF-FM Channel 14 or by calling (415) 556-2760; or the Sector San Francisco Command Center on VHF-FM Channel 16 or by calling (415) 399-3451.



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