



# CAPE COD TIMES

Kayak demonstration gives safety tips

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**NORTH CHATHAM** — When safety officials say "Buckle up — it's the law," they aren't just talking about seat belts. The importance of always strapping on a life jacket was just one of the many safety tips kayakers received from Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 11-01 on Saturday at the Paddle Smart Safety Symposium.

Kayakers often go out without making safety preparations, which "is kind of like going out and driving a car without ever taking driver's ed," explained Dick Hilmer, the flotilla's paddle sports specialist, to the crowd of about 65 kayaking enthusiasts.

Hosted in conjunction with the American Canoe Association, the workshop advised kayakers on basic skills, equipment, preparation, rules, navigation, weather and medical emergencies. The backdrop of Jackknife Cove on Pleasant Bay in North Chatham, a popular boating area, allowed new learners to practice their techniques on the water under the watchful eye of several ACA-certified instructors.

"When I see people out on the water like this, that's what it's all about," Hilmer said as he gestured toward kayakers practicing recovering from capsizing with instructors in the bay. "We really wanted this to be hands-on and we wanted this interaction."

Nantucket held a couple similar workshops indoors, but this was the first outdoor kayak safety event offered on the Cape, Hilmer said. Having kayakers performing new skills could make the difference in saving their lives, he said. "The sport of kayaking moves so fast," Hilmer said. "This is going to save a life. If we can save just one person, that's the mission."

The symposium was held in large part as a response to the tragic deaths of two college-age women in 2003 who disappeared while kayaking in Harwich Port. The women were not wearing life jackets and were inexperienced kayakers who were unprepared for emergencies.

"We're holding this under the shadow of the ghosts of the two kayakers who were lost four years ago," said Jan Schneider, a flotilla officer.

"Most people out here are pretty safe, but you're always going to get some who aren't," said Richard King, flotilla commander, who always wears a life jacket to inspire his 6-year-old grandson Nicholas to don one as well. "I don't think you can give people enough education."

The statistics on boating fatalities are proof of that. About 700 people die in boating incidents in the nation every year, and about 50 of them around New England, according to Al Johnson, recreational boating specialist for the Coast Guard 1st District. There have already been 24 boating fatalities in the New England area this year, and only three of the boaters involved in those incidents were wearing life jackets.

Many kayakers were grateful for the opportunity to brush up on their safety knowledge.

"We've taken lessons but never talked specifically about safety," said Dorothy Coombes of Harwich, who often kayaks with her husband but has no experience on the ocean.

Coombes isn't the only one on the water without formal safety training. Tom Gloria and Andrea Roman of Newton brought their three children to the workshop to pick up some kayaking tips.

"It's good for them to hear these things not just from me, but from professionals," said Gloria, whose in-laws, Paul and Jan Roman, live in Harwich.