

## Stand-Up Paddleboard (SUP) FAQs

U.S. Coast Guard,  
Revised, July 2011

On OCT 3, 2008 the Coast Guard made the determination that "paddleboards," actually Stand-Up Paddleboards (SUP), are considered "vessels" and subject to certain boating safety regulations. To clarify the issue for Eleventh District units we've created this set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

### What is a Stand-Up Paddleboard (SUP)?

A "SUP" as they are called in the sport, is a surfboard-like device, usually thicker and longer than a standard surfboard, where the operator stands upright and propels the board using a long paddle.

### Where am I likely to see a SUP?

The sport has grown tremendously in recent years so you will see SUPs in the surf, offshore, and on flat water lakes and rivers.

### What was the Coast Guard determination?

The Coast Guard determined that SUPs were "vessels" when operating "beyond the narrow confines of a surfing, swimming or bathing area." A vessel, according to 1 USC 3 "includes every description of watercraft or other artificial contrivance used, or capable of being used, as a means of transportation on water."

### OK, but what does that mean to a boarding officer?

It means that if you see a SUP operating:

- A. In the surf or a swimming/bathing area, leave it alone.
- B. On other waters, treat it as a kayak or other paddle craft.
- ~~C. If operating as part of an organized race, parade or other marine event it is exempt from PFD and VDS carriage requirements.~~

### What boating safety regulations apply to a SUP?

Like any paddle craft, a SUP operating outside a surfing or swimming area is subject to the NAVRLES, carriage requirements for PFDs, VDS, sound producing device, navigations lights, and accident reporting.

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### **What kind of lifejackets are required on a SUP?**

Just as with other boats, children (12 years old and under in California) must wear a lifejacket. Adults must have one onboard. PFDs must be Coast Guard approved and either type I, II or III.

**Note:** For people 16 years old and older, who can swim and are comfortable in the water, a good choice is an inflatable lifejacket. They are less cumbersome and come in suspender style and belt-pack style.

### **What kind of sound producing device is required on a SUP?**

As with any paddle craft, a whistle will suffice for a sound producing device.

### **What about navigation lights?**

As with any rowboat, kayak, or other paddle craft, the operator of a SUP need only carry a flashlight that can be shined in enough time to avoid a collision. They are not required to have installed navigation lights.

### **What about Visual Distress Signals (VDS)?**

For boats in California, VDS are only required when operating offshore. If a SUP is operating offshore it would be required to carry VDS under the following circumstances:

- A. If the SUP is less than 16 feet long the operator need only carry VDS if operating between sunset and sunrise.
- B. If the SUP is 16 feet or longer, the operator needs to carry both day and night VDS anytime it is underway (33 CFR 175.110 (a)).

### **Do SUPs have Hull ID Numbers (HIN)?**

No. The Coast Guard waived that manufacturer requirement.

### **Do SUPs have to have registration numbers?**

No. States in D11 do not require registration of paddle craft (CA, AZ, NV, UT). However, other states might.

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**What about "traditional" paddleboards that don't use a paddle but are powered by hand, kneeling or lying down like on a surfboard?**

"Traditional" paddleboards have been around for about 100 years. This style of paddleboard is typically long, pointed, and does NOT use a paddle. The operator "paddles" with his/her hands like on a surfboard. These were not considered in the Coast Guard's "vessel" determination, which said, *"The sport involves a person standing on a board, similar to a surfboard and propelling themselves through the use of a paddle."* Even if a traditional paddleboard had been classified as a "vessel" it would be exempt from lifejacket carriage requirements because it is powered by hand rather than *"by machinery, sails, oars, paddles, poles, or another vessel."* (33 CFR 175.11)

Traditional paddleboards are also exempt from VDS requirements per 33 CFR 175.115.

**Where can I find these regs in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)?**

Most recreational boating requirements can be found in 33 CFR, between parts 173 and 187.