

## Kayak Fishing Safety Preparation

Written by Paul Belmudes

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 00:43

---

### To Prevent a Tragedy, You MUST Prepare and Think Safety First



Not to be scary about the news, but it seems that every month we read about someone here in Hawaii that becomes a casualty of the ocean. The photograph above is a photo taken of a rescue last week on March 12, 2010 on the Big Island in Puako in which a man lost his life while kayaking. From what I heard, there could have been preventive measures that would have prevented this from happening. It's not just kayak fishing, it could be regular kayaking, boating, surfing, wind-surfing, stand-up paddle boards, snorkeling and the list goes on. These outdoor sports here in Hawaii have the potential to claim your life if you are not prepared. Today I want to share with you my preparation for kayak fishing safety to help make sure that I come home to

## Kayak Fishing Safety Preparation

Written by Paul Belmudes

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 00:43

---

my wife and two children.

When I started out kayak fishing over four years ago, safety was always my main concern, but I did not practice it like I do now. For example, I did not wear my PFD life vest all the time storing it in my front hatch or in the tank well behind the seat. I would go out fishing alone taking the risk of not really knowing my surroundings like I should have known. I did not have a plan on where to ditch if the weather changed on me. I chose bad days to kayak fish without knowing what I was up against, especially with the strong trade winds and high surf on the Big Island. I also did not test my hull for leaks or holes especially after launching from a rocky area.

Three years ago I fished Mahukona by myself. This is probably one of the most dangerous areas to fish because of the strong trade winds that come off the Kohala mountain. I was 30 minutes into my journey when all of a sudden, you could see the white caps coming at me from the north and rain clouds coming over the mountain. Only 3/4 mile offshore, I paddled hard into the wind losing my hat and Maui Jim sunglasses. I cut my line and pounded it out for forty five minutes only to enter the bay like a sail and almost being pushed over. I did have a VHF radio and thought of just giving up and calling for help, but I knew I was strong enough to give it a last effort. I knew that I was not going to make it in where I launched and chose Kapa'a two miles north of Mahukona as where I would ditch my kayak and get off the water. I chose a 45 degree angle and battled for another 45 minute and made it into the bay fully exhausted with my legs shivering from being scared to death. I never before considered an exit strategy when going out on the water. When I made it to the rocks, I pulled my kayak onto the rocks and went and sat down on the bench for 20 minutes to regain my composure. I hitched a ride with some tourist back to my car and did not go back on the water for another month. Talk about being tired from paddling.

When my older brother Jerry was visiting the Big Island several months later, I went out with him and his son Brandon to Keauhou. We were two miles out just getting ready to put our lines out when I notice the shifting of my weight almost caused me to roll my kayak. I looked in the hatch and noticed that my hull was 2/3 full of water. I had no bilge pump or sponge to bail water. I tethered my kayak to my brothers kayak who was on a Ocean Kayak Malibu 2XL that could carry a payload of 550 pounds and towed my kayak back in. Talk about an uncomfortable ride back in without a seat and 600 pounds on the kayak. It turns out that I had a crack in the seam of the scupper hole that filled my kayak full of water. The reason I now check for leaks filling up my kayak with water every so often after a day out in the water.

Yet another encounter I had was being side swiped by a 13 foot tiger shark as it trailed my bait as I was bringing it in to check on it. Thus the reason for me getting amas (outriggers) on my

## Kayak Fishing Safety Preparation

Written by Paul Belmudes

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 00:43

---

kayak and a Shark Shield. I don't ever want a tiger shark creeping up like JAWS that is wider and longer than a kayak coming up on the side of me ever again without having kayak stabilization and deterrence to keep away.

Kayak fishing is an extreme sport and you never know when something could happen out in the water! And I would like to share with you some precautionary measures I use today for safety. Please understand that I don't have every piece of safety equipment. I strongly believe that it is up to you to adapt to your own surroundings and make use of common sense practices to prevent accidents or deaths from happening.

- **FISHING WITH A BUDDY:** Don't go fishing alone and if you do go with someone, don't choose a dumb-ass who will put themselves or you in danger. And if you choose to go by yourself, be prepared using the following.
  - **SELECT THE LAUNCH DESTINATION TO SUIT THE BEST CONDITIONS:** Choose your fishing location for the day you go out. If you know the winds come in at around 11am, get off the water by 10am. Check the weather forecast before you go out and don't go out in any weather that will put you at risk. By choosing the wrong day because of the weather will make a bad day of fishing. So why bother anyway! One of the reasons I have not been out for almost 3 weeks... it's not worth it.
  - **PERSONAL FLOATING DEVICE (PFD):** Purchase a comfortable PFD that you will wear all the time while out on the water. Even though the State of Hawaii does not require you to wear it, it is a state law to have on board. Does it not make sense to wear one in case you accidentally get knocked off your kayak? If your kayak floats away because of a strong current and you can't get back to it, does it not make sense to have one on at all times?
  - **CLOTHING:** In Hawaii, you can wear shorts year round. Just make sure you have sunscreen to protect the legs. As for shirts under your life vest (PFD) get a loose fitting rash guard with sun protection and make it long sleeve if possible. Wear a sun protected cap that protects your neck. I prefer to wear shoes that allow me the freedom to swim with. And have a pair of gloves that will grip a fish. They don't need to be expensive. Also store light rain gear in case for some reason you need to cover up that will fit in you safety or dry bag that is easily accessible.
  - **WHISTLE:** The State of Hawaii requires you have a whistle as part of your safety equipment if you plan to kayak fish. Attach one to your PFD. I have even seen some with a compass attached to the side. The sound of a whistle in decibels is far greater than someone who is screaming for help. You use less energy for more volume with a whistle and it carries better.
  - **KAYAK SAFETY LINES:** I suggest that you use a bow safety line that attaches from your bow down the side to where your body is seated. Some kayakers have them on both sides as a sure way to grip their vessel in case they get knocked off the boat. It allows you a line to grab onto instead of reaching for plastic that can be very slippery. I use my bow line as the central point to tether my waist in case I go over. I never want to be detached from my kayak.
  - **TETHERS:** Anything you have on top of your kayak including yourself should be tethered to the kayak. You never ever want to lose your gear as you have invested a lot of money to

## Kayak Fishing Safety Preparation

Written by Paul Belmudes

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 00:43

---

outfit your kayak for fishing. Some tethers use velcro or carabiners for quick attachment. Keep all tethers neatly out of the way so they don't get tangled and become part of the accident. Tether your rod holders and tether your rods to the kayak. If you decide to tether a fishing rod to the rod holder, you can possibly have your rod holder snapped off by a strong fish and you will lose your fishing pole along with the rod holder... so always secure to your kayak and don't forget to tether your waterproof cameras as well.

- **BILGE PUMP:** Being a kayak angler, you should never hit the water without a bilge pump. Even on a perfect day, you never know when a seam in your kayak is going to go and allow water inside your hull. And with the different hatches on the new kayaks, sudden squalls or rough waves can topple your craft and fill your hull full in no time. The last thing you want when you are 2 miles out is your kayak to be filled with water. So install a portable one or combine your 12 volt fish finder battery and install an electronic pump to keep the water out.

- **WATERPROOF SAFETY BOX:** I use a large X-treme dry box (12"X 9") to carry my first aid kit, extra fishing spool loaded with line, all my extra rigs and lures I use for that specific day, flares, a light reflector, small flashlight, extra batteries for my GPS and light rain gear that can be rolled into a sock ball. I also carry a back-up VHF radio fully charged. Again the safety box is tethered to the kayak behind me placed in the tank well and reachable in case I need it.

- **LIGHTING:** I never fish at night, but if I did... I would recommend using a paddlers deck light that has a suction cup mount. Remember to have some type of lighting in case you do get stuck out there in the dark. My form of this is a small flashlight that I keep in my safety kit.

- **COMPASS:** I really believe that you should never need a compass. The reason I say this is that you should remain close to shore as much as possible and know when to cut your line if a fish is dragging farther and farther out to sea. It's not worth it considering the effort you are going to need to get back to shore. But I do carry a compass and have a digital one that's part of my GPS unit. I have successfully used it to navigate my way to a FAD that was three miles out. In Hawaii unless it's raining really hard, I have never seen it fog in that would make you carry a compass. But it is a good idea to have a cheap one as a safety tool.

- **GPS:** A GPS is a valuable tool that I find necessary for marking great fishing holes, tracking my routes, marking my return destinations when I launch at a new location I am not familiar with. They have a compass heading tool that can guide you to FAD's and you can plug in any coordinates for future return trips. A GPS is a valuable tool that provides landmark coordinates that aid in catching fish.

- **COMMUNICATION:** My first form of communication is to let my wife know where I will be launching from and when to expect me home and who I am fishing with. Secondly, I carry a marine VHF radio (required if you fish more than one-mile out from shore) that has waterproof protection. I coordinate the channel I am on with my fellow anglers and we test to make sure they work before heading out at our launch spot. Tether the radio to your PFD and do radio checks throughout your fishing trip making sure everyone is safe. Carry a cell phone fully charged in a waterproof container and preferably in your PFD pocket if you have one. Don't waste your battery listening to MP3's and make sure you only use this wisely without compromising battery life.

- **WATER:** Carry enough water to keep you completely hydrated. Being exposed to the sun and wind for long periods of time leads to dehydration. I use a smaller ice chest that I fill with frozen water bottles. This serves two purposes as it keeps my sealed bait (opelu) cold and when the water thaws out, it makes one refreshing cold drink. Have at least 48 ounces of water

## Kayak Fishing Safety Preparation

Written by Paul Belmudes

Wednesday, 17 March 2010 00:43

---

for a four hour trip, about 12 ounces per hour as a guide.

- **HOOKS AND GAFFS:** Keep all sharp points away from you as possible. Use wine corks to cover the points on your gaff or kage (spear). Make sure all fishing hooks are stored in a container that will keep them from flying around on deck of the kayak. Nothing is worse than to be hooked by your own arsenal. And if you do get hooked... don't pull out the hook pulling on the barb. It will only make more damage. Simply cut the hook with your pliers and pull the hook through point first.

- **SHARKS:** Call me whatever you like... but I feel that amas (outriggers) on a kayak can help prevent a shark from coming up to close and will also give you the support and stabilization you need to prevent from falling over the side when landing a large fish. With all the struggling going on, I feel that sharks are close by keeping an eye on your hook-up waiting for a slip up. Secondly, I feel more confident that I will not be bothered by sharks because I own a Shark Shield. With this device, sharks are repelled via an electric field that includes spasms in the sharks' snouts. It does not attract sharks to the area or leave damage to the animals, or harm the environment.

- **EPIRB, PLB or SPOT:** Whatever you choose, having a beacon that can track your location for search and rescue (SAR) when activated will give your family peace of mind when kayak fishing. At this time, I do not own one and I am leaning on purchasing an ACR unit because they have come down on their price in comparison to SPOT and they now offer "I'm OK" messaging. For more information, click on the following link: <http://www.406link.com/index.html>

By sharing the above information, I hope that you always consider safety first before embarking on a kayak fishing journey. Aloha!

{mos\_fb\_discuss:5}