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U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Brings Paddler Safety Outreach to Charleston for National Training Event

April 27, 2026 – Officials charged with educating the public about paddler safety will gather in Charleston, South Carolina for Spring AXPAD Training 2026 (**SAT2026**), an immersive safety training event hosted by the **U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Paddlecraft Safety Program (AUXPAD)** in partnership with the **American Canoe Association (ACA)** and **Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission**. The training runs **May 4 through 9** at **James Island County Park** and includes on-water and on-shore instruction designed to strengthen skills, leadership, and community outreach in paddler safety for Auxiliarists, active duty and civilian Coasties, and state employees involved in boating safety education and outreach.

“SAT2026 brings together boating safety professionals from across the country, including U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliarists, state boating law outreach and education specialists, state park staff, and active-duty and civilian Coast Guard personnel,” said Scott Szczepaniak, one of the event organizers and a Recreational Boating Program Specialist with the U.S. Coast Guard. “What makes this training especially powerful is that every participant returns home prepared to deliver paddlesports safety education and outreach in their own communities, extending the impact of this week well beyond Charleston.”

SAT2026 will train more than 50 participants across five instructional tracks, each led by nationally recognized ACA Instructor Trainers and supported by ACA Instructors from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Training varies by track; all participants will be exposed to the **ACA “Smart Start for Safe Paddling”** suite of resources. Each track will focus on particular goals ranging from foundational paddling skills to ACA instructor certification and continuing education for experienced ACA instructors.

“Even as overall boating fatalities are trending downward, paddlesports deaths continue to rise, accounting for a growing share of recreational boating fatalities in the United States,” said Dr. Robin Pope, Director of the USCG Auxiliary’s Recreational Boating Safety Outreach Directorate, former President of the Board for the American Canoe Association, and Smart Start co-author. “That troubling trend shows why events like SAT2026 are so important. We’re equipping folks

on the front lines to help paddlers return home safely and to reverse the trend through better education and outreach.”

Instructor Trainers and Instruction Team

Training will be led by an expert team of ACA Instructor Trainers and Instructor Trainer Educators drawing on Charleston’s deep bench of world class paddlesports educators, including [David McPherson](#), [Ashley Brown](#), [Bev Cosslett](#), [Josh Hall](#), and [Scott Szczepaniak](#). Dr. Robin Pope from North Carolina, another world class paddlesports educator, will be joining the team, as well.

Location

James Island County Park offers sheltered on-water training venues, including more than 10 acres of waters available to paddle and nearby coastal waterways such as the Stono River, Folly River, and Charleston Harbor.

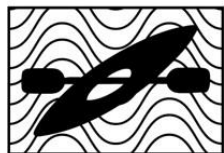
“We’re incredibly fortunate to host SAT2026 in Charleston with our partners at the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission,” said Roland McDevitt, Division Chief for Paddlecraft Safety in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. “James Island County Park offers world-class training venues and facilities, and when you combine that with top-tier instructors and community support, it creates a learning environment that’s second to none. Events like this wouldn’t be possible without the dedication of our partners and the natural assets Charleston brings to paddlesports safety education.”

Media resources:

- [SAT2026 web site](#)
- [James Island County Park web site](#)
- [Water Sports Foundation: A Record Decline in Boating Fatalities with One Glaring Exception: Paddlesports](#)
- [Photo Gallery from SAT2025](#)
- [Recap article SAT2025](#)
- [ACA Smart Start for Safe Paddlers](#)

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