

Tips for the Kayak Escort in the Swim Around Key West

By Monica Woll

We thank you for your interest in participating in this event and we hope that you and your swimmer will have the greatest success. Hopefully, the following tips will prove helpful.

There is more than one type of kayak. A cockpit style kayak is only recommended for experienced paddlers. The perfect escort kayak in our event is a sit-on-top since they are self bailing and more stable. Furthermore a sit-on-top is much cooler to operate in our tropical conditions. However, exposure to sun is greater so be prepared with lots of sunscreen and/or a towel to cover your legs.

Your presence along side the swimmer is essential to your swimmer completing the course. Your failure to stay along side your swimmer could place him/her in jeopardy. Your presence provides your swimmer with protection from jet skis and other motorized craft on the water. Don't assume every one in a motorized craft is paying attention or expecting a swimmer in the open water. In addition to protecting your swimmer you are the swimmers supply line to nutrition. You have his/her liquids and food products. For you to become separated from your swimmer could pose a great threat to his/her safety. No one is more important to your swimmer during the event than you!

There will be 7 "Committee Boats" on the swim course. Their whole purpose is to keep an eye on you and your swimmer. These boats will be marked with a yellow flag. If you have any needs, flag one of these boats. You will have a bright Day-Glo pennant with your swimmer's number marked on the pennant. The "Committee Boats" will recognize you as a participant of the Annual Swim by that pennant. Make sure it is prominently displayed. You will also be given a hand held flare in a plastic bag to be used in case of emergency. At the end of the event please hand in the pennant and the unused flare to the race organizers. It is recommended that you have a cell phone on your kayak. Do not put your cell phone in a plastic baggie. Instead, use waterproof bags or cases that can be purchased in most sporting goods or boating stores.

The phone number you are to call in case of emergency is **305-304-4341**. Please program this cell phone number into your phone right now!! This is the number of the Race Director, Terence White. He will be on the beach at the start/finish line. Mr. White will give you direction. He is equipped with a VHF Radio and will contact any nearby "Committee Boat" to come to your assistance. If there is no "Committee Boat" in sight and you don't have your cell phone handy then use your hand held flare.

If you are in danger do not panic. Follow the recommended procedure:

- 1) Flag a nearby "Committee Boat." If no "Committee Boat" is in sight...
- 2) Call Mr. White by phone and follow his directions. If you don't have a cell phone available...
- 3) Use your hand held safety flare.
- 4) Only contact #911 after all other avenues have failed.

Please remember that most of the way around Key West the water is shallow. You should never be so far out that you cannot see land. The farther you take your swimmer out the farther he has to swim back in. There is no reason for you to get lost as you are kayaking the circumference of an island. Land should always be on your right hand. A map will be given to you at the mandatory pre race meeting on Friday, June 25th at the Radisson Hotel. This meeting will begin at 6:00PM sharp. Swimmers may begin to sign in at 3:30PM. All swimmers and kayakers must be present at the pre race meetings where the course will be explained and questions will be answered. This meeting will be held around the pool area.

If you cannot swim wear your Personal Floatation Device (PFD.) If you choose not to wear it, **it is required by law that you have one on your kayak. Do not stow it in a hatch – it must be ready to grab in an emergency. It is also required to have a whistle attached.**

Other safety gear to have on your kayak:

- ALL: PFD w/whistle attached, paddle (obvious), paddle leash or spare paddle, chart of racecourse in a waterproof map case.
- If you have a cockpit style boat: spray skirt, bilge pump (or other bailing device), and paddle float (this piece of rescue equipment requires training - it assists a paddler in getting back into their boat – another reason for using a sit-on-top kayak).
- Optional: VHF radio, binoculars, camera (preferably waterproof)

Be prepared for sun with sun screen, brimmed hat, and polarized sun glasses. Pack your own drinks and snacks. You will be on the water from 5-8 hours! The swimmers will give you their drinks and snacks in their own containers and instructions as to how often they want to drink and eat. A big part of the escort's job is to remind swimmers that it is time to drink and eat.

If your swimmer cannot continue the race, contact a nearby "Committee Boat" who will escort your swimmer back to the finish line. If no "Committee Boat" is in sight then contact the Race Director, Terence White by phone. Mr. White will contact a "Committee Boat" to escort your swimmer to the finish line. If they cannot swim for any reason, have them hang onto your kayak as you paddle to shore. The best way to paddle a swimmer is to have them hang onto your bow. But whatever is most comfortable for them is the key.

If you take your swimmer to shore, immediately contact the Race Director and follow his directions. A "Committee Boat" will be directed to pick up your swimmer.