

DIVE FLAGS FOR KAYAKS by Tom Holtey

For Dive Regulations in your state see our [Dive Regulation Database coming soon](#).

Divers must use a dive flag for safety and... It's the law! Divers already know this, or at least they should. Snorklers, free divers and even swimmers can benefit from a flag too.

A **dive flag** used in the United States is typically a red flag with a white diagonal stripe from one corner to the other, referred to as a "Diver Down Flag.". In other parts of the world a blue & white "Alpha Flag" is used. The Alpha flag is used in the USA where federal regulations require, when more than 3 miles off shore and in international waters within the US borders. It is best to fly both flags in coastal waters. Use the proper dive flag in accordance with the local area regulations as a signal to other boaters indicating that a diver is down below, under water.



The dive flag creates a zone of safety, by law in most states, around the vessel or float that it flown from. Generally boaters must keep 100 feet away from a vessel (your kayak) to avoid the possibility of running over a diver. That way a diver can be assured that he can surface safely. Generally the diver must surface no more than 50 feet away from the vessel that is flying the dive flag.

A flag must be flown from each and any vessel that has divers in the water. So to follow the letter of the law a group of kayak divers cannot all share the same flag, each kayak must have its own flag. Assuming that the group is sharing an anchor and the kayaks are linked bow to stern in a chain, each with their own flag, you will create an oblong zone of safety large enough for all.

Regulations prohibit flying the dive flag while underway, so you cannot paddle with a dive flag up. But as soon as you have set your anchor, or entered the water to tow the kayak while you swim, you can put up the flag and start your safety zone. When you are done with your dive take down the flag before you paddle off.

If you have been wondering about a safety flag for high traffic areas or in open ocean swell the dive flag mount and pole can be used but NOT a "diver down flag", you will have to fly some other type of flag. Consider sports pennant, American flag, or a **Paddler Visibility Flag**.

Another bonus of using the dive flag is that "good Samaritans" who see your kayak "unattended" will know that the owner is underwater. They will not try to tow your boat back to shore, or steal it, God forbid.

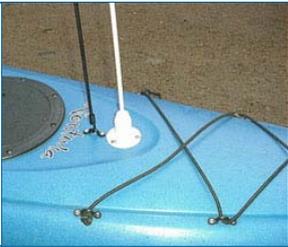


Not every boater knows what a dive flag signifies. So even if you dutifully fly your flag every dive you may still encounter those who violate your safety zone or investigate your "abandoned" kayak. I do not feel that it would be against regulations to write "DIVER" with a marker on the flag. Maybe even "stay away." Always apply your basic scuba safety skills when surfacing.

Also of note is that those who dive at night must have a white reflective diagonal stripe on their flag. Reflective tape or spots on the sides and deck of the kayak would be good too. Chemical light sticks would also help, but remember you need a white 360 degree light on at all times between sunset and sunrise. (see Article: ["Kayak Lights & Kayak Lighting Techniques For Dawn, Dusk & Night Paddling"](#))

Most dive flags have a sleeve to slip over the flagpole staff. They often tie off to the pole in some fashion to keep an up draft of wind from taking the flag. Some flags are made of nylon and others are made of vinyl.

Kayakers will find it to be a challenge to mount a pole to their kayak to fly their dive flag from. There are several ways to do this.



The STS Dive Flag Mount can be used on a kayak that has a scupper hole placed fairly close to gunwale, or in other words, not down the center line. It works best with kayaks that have a flat side like the Scrambler shown to the left. The STS mount is a strap-on sleeve that holds the pole. It is very compact and easy to use. It can be rigged before launch and the pole inserted at the dive site.



Another option is the **Dive Flag Deck Mount** that screws to the deck. A guy-line, or leash, to your pole and flag is recommended for any type of mount. Three **Well-Nuts** are included for easy installation, regardless of internal access or not.

Another way to mount the flagpole is to insert it into a sturdy cork or two that will fit snugly into a scupper hole. **Rubber bottle stoppers** for laboratory use are the best. They have a hole drilled through and this will fit most flagpoles. A dab of silicone O-ring lubricant can help the pole slip through. We carry many sizes of scupper hole stoppers in [The TopKayaker Shop](#).



Some times an inner tube type flagpole mount can be used, with some extra strapping to and threaded through the scupper hole; but what if you your kayak does not have scupper holes? A pole with its own float can be tethered to the kayak if necessary, but there are other alternatives,

Find a location on your kayak that has a vertical surface, strait up and down. This could be in the cockpit area or possibly along the side near the gunwale. Install two **strap eyes** in line to insert the pole into. A bit of tape on the pole will ensure a snug fit.

Backrests can be utilized too to support a pole. Find a place where you cut small slits into the material to insert the pole, or maybe you can poke a couple holes and tie in some cord or zip ties to hold the pole.

Got a fishing pole holder mounted on board? Use it. The pole will be very loose so a strategically placed wad of duct tape or a rubber cork can help hold it snugly into the rod holder.

You can always mount the pole before the launch, but you cannot fly the dive flag until you are at the dive site. (Flag Drawing by Mike Altman)

You will want to plan a way of stowing the flag and pole. A storage hatch will be the best place, but not all kayaks are equipped with a suitable hatch.

A **Deck Net** can be used to secure the flag and pole to the deck while under way. The straps that hold down large cargo hatches can be used too. A **"Paddle Park Kit"** is also compatible with a dive flagpole. You can tie it off to the strap eyes along the gunwale if necessary, just make sure it is secure because the pole will certainly not float, and the flag is unlikely to float either.

Finally you can add some kind of a line to help hold the pole up right and keep it from getting lost if it should fall over.