

ARTICLES - TOP TIPS - BUYING A CANOEING & KAYAKING HELMET - WHAT DOES THE CE MARK REALLY MEAN

Canoe & Kayak UK Test Team - *Posted on 25 Jul 2010*

What is CE Marking?

If you look inside your helmet, or read through manufacturers brochures or websites, you will see a reference to a CE Marking.

The letters CE are the abbreviation of French phrase 'Conformité Européene', which literally means European Conformity. CE Marking on a product is a manufacturer's declaration that the product complies with the essential requirements of the relevant European health; safety and environmental protection legislation as laid out in what are known as Product Directives. Canoeing and kayaking helmets must conform to the CE EN 1385 Standard

The CE EN 1385 Standard

There are six major requirements for a helmet to pass to receive the 1385 standard.

Field of vision

Making sure the helmet design does not interfere with the user's field of vision

Extent of coverage

Making sure the helmet covers all necessary parts of the head

Shock absorbing capacity

The most important is the shock absorbing capacity of the helmet. This is tested in a specialized instrument where the helmet is dropped with the speed of 2,5m/s onto a

solid metal anvil with a 4 kg metal head inside. Inside the metal head there's an accelerometer that measures the forces within the impact. The helmets are tested in four

different conditions: High temperatures (+35°C), low temperature (0°C), after artificial ageing, and after the helmet has been submerged for four hours.

Each helmet is tested on several areas including the crown, side, rear and front. The peak acceleration must not exceed 250G for any of the impacts.

Retention system performance

This test covers the strength of the retention system (webbing), as well as its effectiveness, i.e. the webbings ability to keep the helmet securely positioned on the head.

Buoyancy

After being submerged for at least 4 hours, the helmet must float to the surface.

Durability

After all these tests the helmet should not show any damage that would cause any additional damage to the wearer.

A really important thing to consider is that, due to the nature of the test standards, a helmet tested to the CE EN 1385 standard is not intended for use in whitewater class four and five as described by the International Canoe Federation. Helmets intended for use in those conditions (not unusual on whitewater rivers) are outside the scope of the CE EN 1385 Standard. It is expected that these helmets will have performance requirements in excess of the particular standard!

Things to Consider When Buying a Helmet

Never buy a second hand helmet, from an Internet auction site for instance, as you won't know if it has ever been involved in any sort of accident and therefore possibly weakened.

Helmets vary greatly in price and there two main areas that should be considered when purchasing a helmet. The first and most important area to consider is the level of protection offered by the helmet, followed by the comfort factor. Be realistic about your needs and the kind of paddling you're doing. If running super-hard gnarl is your thing, for instance, then it's probably best to avoid a twenty dollar 'raft' helmet.

If you're running rivers then you could be wearing your helmet for hours at a time, so comfort is also an important area to consider. Most modern kayak helmets will provide a soft inner layer with adjustable retention systems and additional padding to secure around the head. Many types will also provide ventilation holes to keep your head much cooler during more strenuous paddling and in hotter climes.

As with all kayaking kit we'd highly recommend that you try before you buy. Get down to your local retailer and stick a few on your head. A badly fitting helmet can at best give you a headache and at worst be a serious hazard, so take the time to get the right lid for you and then spend a little more time getting the fit absolutely perfect.