



# **SAFETY POLICY**

## **ISSUE 3**

### **Issue Record**

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# DURHAM UNIVERSITY CANOE CLUB

DUAU, Dunelm House, New Elvet, Durham City, DH1 3AN



Canoeing is a sport that has an inherent element of risk. However, as long as you paddle within your ability, take certain precautions, and use your common sense, the risk involved may be minimized. The following document is intended to provide some guidance as to what is and is not acceptable when paddling with Durham University Canoe Club (referred to as The Club hereinafter). It is not designed as a get out clause, to protect you from legal action if something goes wrong because you are negligent.

## 1. SHOULD AN INCIDENT OCCUR, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

- a. We are all consenting adults, and therefore responsible for our own actions. This includes your own safety, as well the safety of those around you.
- b. Next comes the most experienced paddler in the river group. This is not usually the most qualified person, and need not be the trip organiser
- c. Finally, the Club as a whole, and Durham University Athletics Union, and eventually Durham University itself.

## 2. WHAT ARE WE RESPONSIBLE FOR?

Legally, we can be held responsible in two ways.

- a. Being sued for damages in the civil courts. In practice the Athletic Union and then the University would end up bearing the cost
- b. Criminal Liability. Such as manslaughter for the death of another paddler. Any individual who could have reasonably done more to prevent the accident can be held criminally liable.

As long as the following is adhered to, nothing should go wrong. If something does go wrong, you will be able to use this to demonstrate that everything was in order, and you were not negligent, that is providing that you were following the policy.

It is then clearly to your benefit to follow this policy, and to ensure that those around you do so as well. BUT, nothing can provide for every situation you may find yourself in, and so there is no substitute for common sense.

If you find this policy outdated, inadequate, or wrong, then report it to the Executive Committee, so that something can be done. The same applies if the rules are breached, please tell someone.

### Part A – Individual Members

You should be familiar with all the equipment you are using, and how to use it correctly. This covers your boat (you should be able to exit unaided, releasing a spray deck if necessary), your paddles, buoyancy aid (fastened correctly, in good condition), helmet (correctly fitting, secure) and any safety equipment carried.

Always wear a helmet when on the water. Exceptions are on flat water in small groups in calm conditions. Remember that most injuries on flat water are caused by flailing paddles. Be adequately prepared for the prevailing conditions. Wrap up warm if it is cold.

Never paddle alone. This does not mean that there has to be someone else on the water with you, bank support is adequate in some situations.

The decision to paddle rests with you alone. If you are not confident, unsure, or concerned about the trip, you can always stay off the water. This eliminates any danger caused by canoeing.

### Part B – Other People

Always act with consideration for other water users (canoeists or not). Your safety may depend on them if something goes wrong.

If you consider another paddler to be unsafe, or inexperienced, tell them diplomatically. If necessary do not paddle, as you could be held responsible for them. If anyone requires help, give them all the assistance possible, without unduly endangering yourself.



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Part C - White Water Rivers (anything with flow features, not including wholly artificial courses)

All paddlers will wear a buoyancy aid and helmet.

The party will be divided up into small groups, with no more than 7 and no less than 3 people in each. Smaller groups are preferred on narrow rivers, and those where access is sensitive. Each group will know the location of vehicles and keys, and which access and egress points are to be used. Each group will carry sufficient safety equipment appropriate to the hazards reasonably expected. See 'Group Leader Guidelines' for details of equipment. Each group will have at least 2 members able to use these correctly. Each group will have a leader elected, usually the strongest, most experienced paddler in the group, or the person with the greatest knowledge of the river. The leader must be willing to take on the responsibility of being in charge, and be capable of rescuing a swimmer. If nobody is willing to be the leader, do not get on the water. The leader will nominate a 'second', who should be able to assist in rescue, should any incident occur. The instructions of the leader must be followed, particularly when it comes to decisions about whether to portage a rapid. All paddlers should understand international river signals. These are to be confirmed by the leader before a trip commences.

The last group down should always carry a pair of split paddles.

For rivers new to all members of a group, a guidebook must be consulted beforehand, by all members of the group. If necessary, sections should be walked first to inspect (see part D)

Part D - Inspecting from the Bank

Care should be taken when inspecting rivers; wet suit boots are not walking boots! If necessary, safety equipment will be carried e.g. gorges. Always stay in groups. Consult a map if necessary.

Part E - Bank Safety and Rescue

Buoyancy aids and helmets must be worn when inspecting or giving safety cover. Throwlines should only be thrown at swimmers. Capsized boats may have someone about to roll in them, and may be fouled by a throwline. Do not tie off a throwline used for swimmer rescue; it may have to be released quickly if the swimmer becomes entangled. It is preferable to tie yourself off, and hold the line. Do not use a throwline unless you have a suitable knife to hand. All towlines and cow's tails carried must have a quick release mechanism. The first group down a major rapid should wait until the next group is down safely before progressing. The next group should then wait and so on.

Always rescue swimmers first, and equipment later.

Do not put yourself, or anyone else in danger to rescue equipment. If equipment is pinned, wait for help before attempting rescue. At least 3 people are required to safely unpin a boat. If someone enters the water to recover equipment, at least one person with a throwline must be positioned downstream, in case they swim free. If equipment has to be chased by boat, remember that 3 people is still the minimum allowable size of group. If necessary, weak paddlers should get off the water in order that a strong group can chase. If there is any doubt about the safety of the chase boaters, or anyone else, leave the equipment.

Part F – Surfing trips

All paddlers will wear buoyancy aids and helmets.

Rip currents and obstacles should be pointed out to the group prior to launching. At least one in four paddlers on the water should be confident in the prevailing conditions i.e. of rolling if capsized during the biggest sets. The number of paddlers on the water shall be reduced until this condition is reached.

There should be limits set as to where paddlers can go. The stronger paddlers should keep track of the other members in the party. If there are lifeguards present, they should always be consulted before the party embarks.

Part G – Sea Paddling

No Club trip shall take place on the sea, other than in the surf, without a qualified Sea Kayak Instructor.