

Durham University Canoe Club

<https://community.dur.ac.uk/canoe.club/>

SAFETY POLICY

ISSUE 4

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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If you find this policy outdated, inadequate, or wrong, then report it to the Executive Committee, so that something can be done.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

All members should be familiar with the equipment they are carrying, 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). This will all be covered during the first session but if at any point you are unsure, please ask. Additionally, coaches and river leaders should ensure that they are competent using any safety equipment they carry.

Always wear a helmet when on the water. The only exception is fitness training on flat water. Remember that most injuries on flat water are caused by flailing paddles. In any session the leader or coach may stipulate that certain safety kit must be worn or carried, in which case you must comply. Be adequately prepared for the prevailing conditions. Wrap up warm if it is cold.

We strongly recommend against paddling alone. Our more advanced members may on occasion train alone. These paddlers have a wealth of experience, both in their discipline and of their training venue; this allows them to effectively assess the risks involved in paddling in a variety of conditions. This practice however should not be emulated by other members of the club. This does not mean that there has to be someone else on the water, bank support may be 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.

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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.

Part C - White Water Rivers (natural rivers of grade 2 or above)

All paddlers will wear a buoyancy aid and helmet.

On White Water trips, there should be a minimum supervision ratio of 1 leader to 4 participants should be adhered to. On more advanced and narrow river it is advised that the group separates into groups of 3-8, each managed by an allocated leader, usually the strongest, most experienced paddler in the group, or the person with the greatest knowledge of the river. If nobody is willing to be the leader, do not get on the water. The leader may also nominate a 'second', who should be able to assist in rescue, should any incident occur, and who is of a sufficient standard to make it unlikely for them to be involved in any incident themselves. However on wider rivers or flat water sections it may be acceptable for existing groups to join together, providing the supervision ratio is maintained.

In most situations groups should be of at least 3 people, however, with sufficient safety and competent paddlers, smaller groups may be possible. For example, when racing or training, paddlers will often paddle individually or with one competent paddler looking after a single weaker paddler. 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. 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. When paddling with new people these are to be confirmed by the leader before a trip commences. The one exception is for novice groups on grade 2(3) or below; in this situation the leader may decide it is more appropriate not to overload the novice paddlers with information at the start of the trip and could instead elect to teach the group river signals either during the trip or at a later date. In this situation experienced paddlers familiar with the international river signals should be utilized to control the group.

For rivers new to all members of a group, if possible, a guidebook should be consulted beforehand. If necessary, sections should be walked first to inspect. Care should be taken when inspecting rivers; wet suit boots are not walking boots! Always stay in groups. Consult a map if necessary.

Part D - Bank Safety and Rescue

Rescuing participants:

Paddlers have a responsibility to aid any paddler who is in danger, whether they are in their group or not, provided that this does not place themselves or other members of their group in danger.

Buoyancy aids and helmets must be worn when inspecting or giving safety cover. Care should be taken when throwing a line to someone who isn't swimming as 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.

Rescuing equipment:

Always rescue swimmers first, and equipment later. Do not put yourself, or anyone else in danger to rescue equipment. In contrast to rescuing a person, time is no longer a priority. Rescuers should therefore wait until they are able to perform the rescue in the safest manner. This may involve waiting for experienced paddlers or safety cover for the rescuer. If someone enters the water unaided to recover equipment, at least one person with a throwline should be positioned downstream, in case they swim free (note that these principles do not apply to rescuing people). If equipment has to be chased by boat, the group chasing it should be confident enough to chase safely. 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.

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Part E - Forms

On any trips other than the regular sessions, a Trip Form must be filled in and emailed to the members of Team Durham staff specified by Team Durham. This must be done before 3pm on the last working day before the trip. These forms can be generated from the Canoe Club website, for more guidance see the “**Trip Form Guidelines**” document.

In addition, during any session, including Pool Sessions, and Wednesday afternoons, the Health Forms for every member present must be accessible. In general these will be available by signing onto the Canoe Club website as a member of the exec, however, if you are somewhere where there is likely to be poor signal you should download the relevant forms before hand or consider printing them off. After the session the forms should be deleted and any print outs should be destroyed.

When paddling on a river, these forms should be available during the course of the day. The leader should consider whether it is sufficient for the forms to remain in the car, or whether print outs or a phone with the downloaded forms should be taken on the trip.

If a member has not filled in a health form online, a limited number of paper forms should be kept in the boathouse and one of these must be filled in before they partake in the session. (Alternatively members with a phone may fill in the online form.)

Part F – Artificial White Water Courses

When paddling on an artificial course, such as the Tees Barrage or Holme Pierrepont, paddlers should follow the centre rules and safety policy at all times, including competency to paddle, safety equipment guidelines and any training required. Often this will include signing additional health declarations and/or consent forms. Helmets and bouyancy aids should of course always be worn, even if not mentioned in the centres policy. All paddlers should be aware that whilst White Water courses are often safer than natural rivers, they are still potentially dangerous. Paddlers who are new to a course should consider walking down it first, and safety cover should still be set up on large features where necessary.

When paddling on an artificial course, there will be other members of the public there and sometimes there will be safety provided. As such it is possible for groups as small as one or two people to paddle there safely, however, paddlers should be prepared to get off as soon as there are not enough other people on the course to paddle safely. Any group which goes to a white water course to paddle should be fully self sufficient in terms of providing safety cover (the exception being at events such as NSR or BUCS where safety cover is provided).

There will be paddlers of many disciplines at the course, to which you should be polite and courteous to all. Priority must always be given to the upstream boat. However, paddlers should also observe paddling etiquette when possible (which contradict this slightly); try to avoid waiting under slalom gates and if someone is “playing” a feature, eddy out and wait until they are finished before paddling down. Paddlers in plastic boats should also take all reasonable action to avoid contact with composite boats. This may cause significant damage and could damage the reputation of the universities paddlers. If in doubt, ask other people on the course.

Part G – 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 and rescuing other paddlers. 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.

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Part H – Sea Paddling

No Club trip shall take place on the sea, other than in the surf, without a qualified Sea Kayak Instructor or a paddler of equivalent experience in sea kayaking.

Part I – Flat Water

When paddling on flat water, there should always be enough competent paddlers to manage the groups. As a minimum requirement the ratio of coaches to participants should be kept under 1:8 and each coach should be happy with the number of paddlers they are to be allocated. The coach should identify safe access and egress areas for the group and boundaries should be set for the group in order to keep everyone together. The current weather consideration should be taken into account, with coaches making sure that participants are wearing suitable clothing for the temperature and wind. In addition, even flat rivers may become unsafe after a significant amount of rain. If the river is too high then, the session should be adapted appropriately or cancelled.

In addition, paddlers should be aware of other river users, the prime example being rowers, fishermen or the Prince Bishop cruise boat. As with white water courses, the leaders should be aware of how other people use the river in order to avoid any potential conflict.

When paddling in a pool many of the same considerations must be taken into account. In addition to this, any poolside rules must be followed. Activities such as running on the poolside or anything which would be considered unsafe whilst swimming, is still unsafe whilst on a canoeing trip.

Part J – Paddling at night or with limited visibility

When paddling at night or with limited visibility, considerable extra care should be taken and in most situations it is not recommended. All paddlers should be entirely self-sufficient for the conditions, or under very close one-to-one supervision from an experienced member.

The use of lights, where possible, is strongly recommended when paddling in a group in order to avoid becoming separated.