

# Dragon Boat Canada Safety Guidelines

## Introduction

Dragon Boating is a safe sport when conducted with due consideration for the risks inherently associated with any outdoor water sport. There is the risk of personal injury from collision and the risk of drowning when dragon boat crews find themselves in the water. All risks are heightened in cold water. While contending with difficult weather conditions is part of the sport, safe enjoyment of the sport is the aim. Concern for personal safety must be paramount. Each club/crew is responsible for assessing the risks in its particular environment and in establishing the appropriate safety procedures to minimize those risks. Nothing in this document in any way limits an individual's responsibility for assessing his or her personal skills and for the outcome of his or her decisions and actions.

Each member of Dragon Boat Canada is responsible for knowing and adhering to the Transport Canada regulations, especially those applicable to dragon boating.

In all cases of accident involving injury or property damage a representative of the club/crew, or event organizers shall notify the Dragon Boat Canada National Office in writing immediately.

Additional safety requirements specifically for festivals and sport races is set out in the DBC Rules of Racing and DBC Sanctions Forms. Arrangements must be made to meet all Safety Requirements in order to obtain sanction to hold the festival/race.

The Guideline is set out under the following headings:

- Safety Advisor
- Local Safety Code
- Emergency Communication
- Hazards
- Safety Equipment and Safe Equipment
- Risk Management
- Operations
- Cold Weather/Water and Hypothermia
- Hot Weather and Hyperthermia
- Off-site boating (training camps)



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## **Safety Advisor**

Every club/crew should appoint a member as a safety advisor whose duty is to ensure that an appropriate safety program is drawn up and implemented in accordance with the guidance provided in this Guideline.

## **Local Safety Code**

Since conditions vary from location to location, each club/crew should draw up and display a Local Safety Code, covering such matters as the following.

- A plan of the local water showing the traffic circulation patterns, local rules of river/water use, hazards and safe landing sites in the event of an emergency
- Circumstances in which there must be a safety boat attending any dragon boaters
- Equipment that a safety boat is required to carry
- Equipment that a dragon boat must carry either when accompanied by a safety boat or not (if the latter is permitted)
- Responsibilities of paddlers, steersmen, drummers, and coaches. These can include checking the safe condition of equipment before taking it on the water, familiarity with the local weather, and implementing rules and procedures on the water such as remaining within a certain distance of the safety boat
- Procedures in the event of a crew member ending up in the water
- Weather conditions under which dragon boaters should not venture on the water such as high wind, poor visibility and ice conditions
- Cold water rules
- Competency requirements of safety boat operators
- Guidelines relating to dragon boating before sunrise and after sunset
- Boat/Clubhouse rules
- Use of an out/in logbook

## **Emergency Communications**

A list of vital telephone number should be displayed prominently in every boat/clubhouse to include:

- Doctor/Ambulance/Police
- Fire Department
- Local hospital casualty department
- Local river or harbour police
- The emergency service that can provide the quickest on-water response

If there is no telephone readily available at the boat/clubhouse, clear directions to the nearest available telephone must also be displayed.

The possible need for emergency communication from the water should also be considered, whether by two-way radio or cellular phone.



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Safety Protocol  
070216

## **Hazards**

- Hazards can include swift currents, spring run-offs, bridges, weirs, shoals, deadheads, rocky shores or steep walls or banks that make getting out of the water difficult or impossible in an emergency, and recreational and commercial traffic including float planes.
- Attention should also be drawn to any variation in normal procedures that may be necessary due to the state of the tide or stream, high wind or other climatic conditions. It is intended that local codes of practice will emphasize that safety is paramount.

## **Safety Equipment and Safe Equipment**

- Safety and first aid equipment should be readily available in every boat/clubhouse to include:
  - ✓ First aid chest (to be fully stocked and regularly checked)
  - ✓ Thermal blankets/exposure bags
  - ✓ Life rings/buoy and line
  - ✓ Personal Floatation Devices (PFD's)
- Clubs/crews should ensure that all equipment used for dragon boating and coaching is safe and maintained in good order. Every dragon boat must have:
  - ✓ Lights as required by Transport Canada when paddling in reduced light
  - ✓ Bailing vessel
  - ✓ PFD of appropriate size for each individual in the boat
  - ✓ A sound signaling device
  - ✓ Throw Lines
- Coach/safety boats. In practice the coach boat is also frequently the safety boat. Any coach boat on the water can provide a measure of safety, but the term safety boat is used in this Guideline to indicate that the boat has designated "safety" duties, such as remaining within a certain distance of the boats it is accompanying, and must carry specific safety equipment, even if it is also acting as a coach boat.
- Coach/safety boats should be equipped with safety equipment in accordance with Coast Guard rules as well as such items as a medical kit, thermal blanket and hand pump.
- Coach/safety boats should provide for easy entry from the water (e.g. step, ladder or handhold). Where motors are equipped with a kill switch, the switch must be attached to the operator.
- Coach/safety boats and their engines should be properly maintained since failure, particularly at a critical time, could have serious consequences.



## **Risk Management**

An important risk management process that applies to all aspects of dragon boat operations is to ask “what if...” a certain situation arises – what might the consequences be and how can such consequences be prevented? If the consequences could be serious even if the likelihood of a situation arising is considered remote, the situation should be avoided or precautions taken to be able to mitigate the consequences.

A vital component of assessing the possible consequences of a situation or incident and of taking appropriate avoidance measures or precautions is the coldness of the water. Submersion in cold water is extremely dangerous, causing a swimmer to lose heat far more rapidly than exposure to cold air. Depending on the coldness of the water, loss of muscle function and mental confusion can occur within minutes. See the paragraphs below on Cold Weather and Water.

## **Operations**

- Motorboat drivers must be competent to control the boat so that it does not become a danger to the crew(s) or others, and must comply with the Transport Canada Operator Competency certificate requirements.
- Paddling before posted sunrise and after posted sunset is discouraged, particularly where there are other vessels using the waters at those times, and should not be practiced without bright navigational lights and an accompanying safety boat. An additional risk is posed by paddling after sunset, as an incident such as capsizing has to be dealt with in darkening conditions.
- Coaches are responsible for those in their charge and should ensure that they are informed of safety procedures and abide by them. Coaches should be aware of the forecast weather and should evaluate the environmental conditions before deciding; in light of the crews' capabilities and limitations, whether it is safe for the crew to go out on the water
- Clubs should provide adequate instruction in watermanship and paddling technique, plus adequate supervision by coaches and experienced paddlers to ensure that no person boating from the club/crew puts him or herself at risk when on the water. This applies particularly to participants under the age of 18. Inexperienced steersmen should be allowed out in boats only if accompanied by an experienced coach. All active members should learn and practice capsize and accident drills.
- Clubs/Crews should treat the coaching of steersmen and their education in watermanship and good safety procedures as being as important as coaching paddlers. Steersmen should receive a full education in safety procedures and boat handling.
- Dragon Boaters should be able to swim 50m in light clothing, be sufficiently at ease in the water not to panic and be able to keep afloat. If a person cannot meet this requirement for physical or other reasons, an approved PFD should always be worn when on the water.
- The “buddy-system” should be implemented before participants enter the boat. Participants are to know who their “buddy” is before entering the boat.
- In case of accident, participants should be instructed to stay with the boat rather than attempt to swim to safety, however strong a swimmer a crewmember may be. The boat, unless seriously damaged, can be considered a life raft. If the water is cold crewmembers should be instructed to get as much of their body out of the water as possible by draping themselves over the upturned hull. Crewmembers should also be instructed to “buddy-up”, two holding on to each other until rescued to provide mutual support and to help ensure that all are accounted for.



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Safety Protocol  
070216

- Steersmen and Drummers should wear a PFD at all times when on the water, as should coach and safety boat drivers and their passengers.
- Clubs/crews should take active steps to encourage members to become fully conversant with lifesaving and resuscitation procedures, by attending training courses and other appropriate means. In particular it is highly desirable that the Club Safety Advisor and all regular club coaches should be so trained.
- Club/crew paddling activities should be coordinated with those of other local water users to minimize clashes of interest and the possibility of additional water hazards arising.
- A logbook can be used to log crew members out and in, particularly when they are allowed to paddle unsupervised.

### **Cold Weather and Water**

Preparation and prevention are essential in protecting against the effects of the cold-water environment.

- All persons should wear protective clothing appropriate for the conditions and their activity, and as far as possible commensurate with the needs of the paddling motion and activity, with the objective being to keep the body dry and to insulate against heat loss.
- When the water temperature is at 10 degrees Celsius or below, or otherwise when the environmental conditions may warrant, special safety precautions, proposed by the club/crew safety officer, should be considered. Possibilities for additional safety precautions include:
  - ✓ Allowing crew to go out on the water, where appropriate, only if attended by a safety craft.
  - ✓ Not allowing crew to go out on the water

### **Hot weather**

As with cold weather, preparation and prevention are important in protecting against the effects of heat.

- All persons should wear protective clothing appropriate for the conditions and their activity.
- Use of sun block with high SPF.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exposure to hot weather.
- Address any symptoms of heat stress immediately.

### **Off-site Dragon Boating (training camps)**

If a club/crew conducts dragon boating activity at a location away from the club/crew premises the same safety issues set out in this Guideline need to be addressed afresh.

- An adequate number of coaches should accompany the crew(s) to provide supervision and meet any safety needs.
- Information should be obtained about local water conditions and hazards, traffic patterns, vital telephone numbers and local safety and rescue arrangements in the case of accident.
- If using the facilities of another club/crew this information should be readily available and should be studied. Local equipment, coach/safety boats, safety and first aid equipment should also be assessed for its condition and adequacy.
- If the location is remote from another club, this information should be obtained from local residents and from a visual inspection before crews take to the water. In addition, the club/crew should bring or obtain its own safety and first aid equipment to address its safety needs such as PFD's, medical supplies and safety boats.
- Particular care must be taken about weather and water conditions when paddling on unfamiliar water.
- It is prudent for all participants taking place outside their province or outside Canada to obtain travel medical insurance coverage.

## Transport Canada's Regulations For Dragon Boats

### **Safety Equipment Requirements**

Unless exempted as described below, Dragon Boats are required to carry:

- One Canadian approved personal flotation device (PFD) or lifejackets of appropriate size for each person on board;
- One sound signaling device
- Throw line
- Navigation lights that meet the applicable standards set out in the Collision Regulations if the pleasure craft is operated after sunset and before sunrise or in periods of restricted visibility.

### **Exception for Dragon Boats, Racing Canoes, Racing Kayaks and Rowing Shells**

A pleasure craft that is a racing canoe or a racing kayak is not required to carry personal protection equipment, boat safety equipment and distress equipment in accordance with the Act if it and its crew are engaged in formal training, in an official competition or in final preparation for an official competition and,

A. it is attended by a safety craft carrying a personal flotation device or lifejacket of appropriate size for each member of the crew:

- (i) of the pleasure craft, if the safety craft is only attending the pleasure craft, or
- (ii) of the largest vessel being attended, if the safety vessel is attending more than one vessel, and

B. it carries:

- (i) a personal flotation device or lifejacket of appropriate size for each member of the crew,
- (ii) a sound-signaling device, and
- (iii) if it is operated after sunset and before sunrise, a watertight flashlight.