

Great White North Safety Policy and Procedures

Introduction

Dragon boat safety is a partnership of all stakeholders in the sport, including athletes, coaches, steerspersons, site safety staff and support emergency services. Everyone has a role to play to ensure that the sport is as safe as possible at all times and that clear, integrated procedures are in place for foreseeable emergency situations. The Dragon Boat Canada Safety Policy takes its lead from the IDBF Water Safety Policy and the Canadian Coast Guard Safety Policy.

The *Safe Boating Guide* (a free handbook) is a valuable resource for general reference, particularly when the practice site involves other water craft. The Canadian Coast Guard can be reached at 1-800-267-6687 or check their website at www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca.

Regulations and procedures are an important guide, but nothing replaces common sense and a degree of reasonable caution in certain situations.

Site Equipment

It is expected that practices or events always have appropriate safety boats and staff present to provide assistance in case of emergency. Staff members should be certified to drive a motor boat, have CPR and First Aid training and are well versed with the procedures to follow. Radio contact with shore through a site manager, marine response or ambulance service is recommended.

Personal Safety Issues:

Each athlete has to take personal responsibility of their front-line safety in the areas of equipment, hydration, warm up, sun exposure and safety procedures education. A comprehensive safety plan is dependent on every member of the crew doing their part in this regard.

Safety equipment will include a properly fitted and approved PFD as well as all-weather wear for appropriate training conditions. There are many excellent products (dri-fit, neoprene, gore-tex, etc.) that can make your training comfortable and safe, especially in colder weather conditions.

Hydration is very important at all times and water bottles should be considered to hydrate before, during and after the workout.

Sun screen is a must in summer training situations, especially if the training or racing is done in mid-day. There are many products especially designed for water sport use. A hat is always a good idea for sun and rain.

Warm up should include a selection of torso rotation, lower back, hamstrings and shoulder exercises to ensure the body is warm, loose and prepared for the necessary range of motion for effective technique. Exercises can include trunk rotations (upright, bent-over, bent-back), dog-cat stretch, child's pose, shoulder stretch (anterior, posterior), arm circles, to name a few.

Waterborne Infections

Athletes should always be careful with raw water exposure (water bottles in the bottom of the boat), water on open wounds (cover with a water-proof dressing if possible) and general contact. At the earliest possible time after practice, a shower is recommended, cleaning ears, eyes and nose. If the athlete falls ill after water sport activity, a doctor's visit should inform the doctor of water sport involvement.

Emergency Procedures Education

Each member of the team must completely understand the following team safety procedures and their first responsibility is to take the time to really absorb the necessary knowledge to build the highest degree of confidence in all situations. Everyone acts differently in times of emergency and the clearer the team safety process is to each stakeholder, the better chance of successful implementation.

Team Safety Issues:

As coach of your team, you must be able to work with the crew captain to:

- Ensure the proper safety equipment is available to your crew at all times on the water
- Educate your crew members as to their responsibilities and actions in a safety emergency
- Exercise appropriate caution and preventative measures to avoid high-risk situations as much as possible.

The following is a summary of effective and necessary precautions that can be taken to ensure that all water time is as safe as possible. It is recommended that the highest degree of adherence to these rules be followed at all times.

1) Boat Safety Equipment and Initial Precautions

Equipment: Each boat leaving the dock should have the following:

- A Canadian Coast Guard approved PFD for each crew member*
- Two bailers
- One whistle worn by the steers person
- Two spare paddles
- One throw buoy
- Front and rear boat lights, (red/green on front, white on back, see *Safe Boating Guide*) if night paddling is undertaken.

* It is recommended that weak swimmers wear their PFD at all times. Some areas in Canada may require that the PFD be properly worn by all crew members at all times. In case of emergency it is expected that each member can find their PFD and put it on in the water, if necessary. It is recommended that if the water temperature is below 15 degrees C, that PFD's be worn by all crew members at all times.

Precautions:

- As administered by the crew captain or designate, each person in the boat should be aware of the buddy system and who their buddy is for the water session, usually the person beside them in the same seat. The drummer will buddy with the front pair and the steersperson with the last pair. In case of a swamped or capsized boat it is the first responsibility of a buddy to make sure their partner is safe and well.
- It is recommended that basic swimming competence (100m in light clothing in 3 minutes) be expected from all team members, particularly if the team expects to paddle without PFD's being worn at all times.
- Before starting the practice the crew captain must be informed and fully aware of any medical conditions of team members, as well as any weak swimmers. The crew captain must also know the exact number of people in the boat and that the boat is reasonably balanced, left to right, front to back.
- The crew captain should be aware of site safety staff on shore or on the water and communicate with such staff their practice plan. It is also recommended that such water staff have radio contact with shore staff.

2) Training Areas

Common sense should be used by the crew and coach at all times when choosing the practice site. Consideration should be given to the water conditions (wave action, winds, currents, water depth and temperature), proximity to other water craft, and shore access. The coach should always think about the possibility of an emergency and how easy it would be to get assistance to the crew. If a number of crews are paddling at the same time, an agreed-upon paddling circuit will ensure a minimal chance of collision. A clearly laid-out water practice site using buoys and identifiable land marks is very important. Race site safety should be clearly communicated to all crew representatives before a regatta begins.

3) Boat Management

Bracing the boat may be necessary because of unstable conditions caused by winds, waves or personnel movement. This is done by having all or part of the crew "feathering" their paddles on the water surface to widen the base of support. The feathering technique ("spread the butter on the toast") is an important safety skill and helps paddlers feel confident in leaning out over the water to stabilize boat roll in all situations (feathering as an instinctive reaction to boat roll can avoid many potential mishaps). If water conditions are very dangerous then part of the crew can brace the boat while part of the crew paddles, to ensure the highest degree of safe movement. The command should be "**brace the boat**". Part boat bracing (even, odd, front, back) can be used as a variation that allows a degree of mobility and stability. Stopping the boat may need

to be done to turn quickly or avoid collision. This is done best by the whole crew taking a backwards stroke together, followed by another one or two strokes, if necessary. The command should be “**stop/hold the boat**”.

These skills should be practiced in non-emergency situations to allow the crew to react instinctively to the commands.

4) Safety Scenarios

Safety procedures will depend on the availability of safety staff on site. Ideally there should be a staff person on land and a water staff person in a motor boat. It is recommended that a practice/race site management group invest in the equipment and training (radio contact, CPR, first-aid, air horns, cell phone) for such staff. The suggested routine below may be adjusted to suit the specific practice/race environment.

It is critical that the agreed-upon set of actions is clearly communicated and understood by all parties. It is recommended that the following coordinated procedures be broken down into specific actions by each of the safety stakeholders (see Appendix #1 as an example for *capsized or swamped boat*). It is a useful exercise to do this as a crew, so that all perspectives (paddler, steersperson, coach, water safety staff, site safety staff) are known and understood. This activity is particularly important if the practice site does not have all of the safety staff mentioned above, thereby requiring a customization of the safety steps for a particular site.

Medical Emergency (Land)

- In the event of a medical emergency on land, the site staff or designate will contact Emergency Medical Services (EMS) if possible and an appropriate person will use standard first aid procedures to assist until professional support arrives. In the absence of such first-stage expertise, the affected person should be kept warm, conscious and quiet as much as possible. In an ideal environment, a qualified CPR/first-aid operator should be in each crew. A cell phone on site is also very useful.

Medical Emergency (Water)

- In the event of a medical emergency on water, the affected crew shall stop paddling and every other paddler seat will raise their paddle overhead as the alternate seats brace the boat.
- The steersperson will alert the safety boat with three sharp whistle blasts.
- The safety boat operator will approach the rear of the dragon boat from the leeward side (keep motor running) to communicate with the steersperson and determine the extent of the emergency.
- The safety boat operator will communicate with the senior shore staff to call for EMS or other support as necessary.
- The injured party may be transferred to the safety boat and transported to shore or will be paddled directly, whichever is most time-efficient and safest.
- If the safety boat has to return to the dock, safety boat staff will announce an “all-return” signal to other crews with three air-horn blasts. All boats will immediately return to the docking area until given permission to continue practice.
- The injured party will be treated with standard first-aid procedures by safety staff until professional support arrives. At least one member of the crew should be asked to stay with the injured party to assist.

Paddler Overboard

- In the event of a paddler overboard, the crew shall stop paddling and every other paddler seat will raise their paddle overhead as the alternate seats brace the boat.
- The steersperson will alert the safety boat with three sharp whistle blasts.
- The overboard paddler should indicate to the crew (if possible) that he/she is ok and if necessary “tuck up” to preserve body heat. The crew should not try to pull the paddler back into the boat (assuming safety staff is present).
- The safety boat operator will approach the rear of the dragon boat from the leeward side (keep motor running) to communicate with the steers person and find the overboard paddler.
- The safety boat operator will assist the overboard paddler into the safety boat, then decide if the paddler is able to continue the practice. If so, the paddler will be returned to the boat. If not, the paddler will be transported back to the dock and the crew shall follow.

- If the safety boat has to return to the dock, safety boat staff will announce an “all-return” signal to other crews with three air-horn blasts. All boats will immediately return to the docking area until given the permission to continue practice.
- When the paddler is returned to shore, if unable to continue for reasons of injury or hypothermia, standard first-aid procedures will apply as EMS are contacted. At least one member of the crew will be asked to stay with the injured party to assist.

Capsized or Swamped Boat

- Crew members should let the boat roll over or sink, making sure to clear themselves from their seat partner and the boat, if possible.
- If caught under the boat, crew members should come up in the air pocket, breathe and then duck back down away from the boat as they orient themselves by grasping the gunwale.
- Crew members should check for their buddy and inform the crew captain if someone is missing. Crew members should stay with the boat (leave overturned) and buddy, assisting if injured by holding the back of the PFD and the boat gunwale for support. Crew members should “tuck up” and remain still to conserve body heat as necessary.
- The steersperson will alert the safety boat with three sharp blasts with the whistle, if necessary.
- The safety boat operator will approach the rear of the dragon boat from the leeward side (keep motor running) to communicate with the steersperson and watching out for people in the water.
- The safety boat operator should assist any injured paddlers into the safety boat while directing the able bodied paddlers to stay with the boat as a head count by the crew captain is taken.
- All other crew members should stay with the boat and if possible under the instructions of the crew captain roll the boat over and start to swim it to shore. The first concern is the safety of the crew, before the recovery of the boat. Discretion must be used to decide a course of action based on the swim competency of the crew, the water temperature and the proximity to shore.
- The safety boat operator will inform the site staff person of the emergency to trigger EMS as necessary.
- Safety boat staff will announce an “all-return” signal to other crews with three horn blasts. All boats will return to the docking area until given the permission to continue practice.
- In the event of a collision between two boats, the above procedures still apply. Each crew is responsible for their own members and care should be taken to ensure that members are not mixed, creating confusion.

In the absence of safety boat support, the IDBF safety rules should apply (see IDBF Competition Regulations – Capsized Dragon Boat – Unescorted Crews).

If there is no rescue boat available then in calm conditions the whole crew may attempt to “swim” the boat to the nearest safe landing point, as directed by the crew captain. In conditions are not suitable for “swimming” the boat, then as a last resort the crew may leave the boat and swim to shore in pairs using the buddy system, again under the control of the crew captain. As with other methods, the crew must be accounted for at all times during any attempts to swim the boat or as pairs under the buddy system. However in a training situation, members are advised to not attempt to swim to shore unless they are wearing PFD’s. Should there be no alternative but to swim to shore, then any member who is not wearing a PFD should join a “buddy” pair with PFD’s or make up a group (or groups) of three, to provide mutual support and assistance during the swim.

Despite the best efforts of the crew to safety-proof themselves for all emergencies, there may be a situation arise not covered by the above contingencies. Common sense and an awareness of the roles played by the crew members, steers person, water safety staff, site staff and support services in ensuring the highest degree of safety must be recognized and followed at all times.

Summary of Important Safety Warning Indicators

1. Paddles up - by alternate crew members to alert water staff to an emergency
2. Whistle blasts (3) - by the steersperson to alert water staff to an emergency
3. Horn blasts (3) - by the land or water coach/staff as a signal for all crews to return immediately to the docking area

Skills Practice

1. Procedures analysis for common safety scenarios, as a crew
2. Swim Test – 100m in light clothing in 3'
3. Put PFD on in the water
4. Man overboard protocol
5. Capsized/swamped boat practice/simulation
6. General First Aid for key members
7. CPR for key members

After an emergency it is prudent to document the incident for reasons of general communication, follow-up, liability and future safety improvements. A safety incident form may be useful in this regard.

Suggested Crew Accident/Incident Report

Date and time of the accident/incident:

Staff on duty:

Crew affected:

Contact person:

Phone #:

Nature of accident/incident:

Injured party (if any):

Crew actions and time:

Staff response actions and time:

EMS response actions and time:

General comments and recommendations:

Note to Instructors:

As well as a test (written and/or practical), some instructional time to get first impressions of procedures in a “sample emergency” would be helpful. Before the module is handed out, ask each person to write down the first three things they might do for a given situation, ie; swamped boat. Discuss the various answers, this probably will show that many people might do things differently, therefore the need for a clear, well-understood process. We may also get some good original ideas for future revisions!

It is recommended that the instruction around the above formal procedures would be interactive in nature, rather than lecture-based as much as possible. The breakdown of a selected safety scenario into component

views (see Appendix #1) would be a valuable exercise for the course participants, perhaps some role playing could be involved as well). Some discussion around contingencies in less than ideal situations is also encouraged. These steps would be helpful to gain individual ownership over a site safety plan. **The steps must be instinctive in times of stress, an important point to emphasize through the module.**

Appendix #1:

Safety Perspectives – a sample analysis

Everyone must know the specific sequence of appropriate actions from their perspective in an emergency. The following represents a generic sense of this, the actual steps would depend on the situation and the support resources available at the time. It is a useful exercise to “what if?” a variety of safety emergencies to help people focus on their individual roles.

Safety Emergency: Capsized or Swamped Boat

Athlete:

- Brace the boat to avoid swamping if possible
- If the boat starts to overturn, make sure you push away from the boat, watching out for your seat buddy
- Make sure your PFD is properly worn
- Check that your buddy is ok, if not let the crew captain know immediately
- Hold the side of the boat and wait for instructions, collecting paddles and loose equipment within easy reach
- If the boat is close to shore, be prepared to swim the boat to shore, making sure all team members are accounted for
- If there are injured parties, be prepared to assist with getting the injured team members into the safety boat as quickly as possible
- If there is any delay, make sure you are countering potential hypothermia as necessary, by tucking up to conserve body heat
- When the team is all on shore, report to the crew captain for the head count
- Get out of your wet clothes as soon as possible
- Shower as soon as possible, paying attention to eyes, ears and open wounds

Crew Captain:

- Report to your buddies in the back seat that you are personally ok (if not, designate responsibility)
- Blow the whistle three times to alert the safety boat
- Call for each seat group to make sure everyone is fine
- Decide which is the best course of action, stay with the boat, stay with the boat and swim it to shore, leave the boat and swim to shore in pairs
- Coordinate with the safety boat your chosen course of action and direct the safety boat to assist injured parties
- Keep calm and direct at all times
- When on shore take a head count for all members

Coach (if different from the crew captain):

- Alert the safety water staff by three horn blasts
- Approach the overturned boat from the leeward side (always be aware of the prop), looking for potential members under the boat or missing as identified by their buddies
- Calm the crew, measured voice, clear concise instructions
- Coordinate injured parties pickup with the safety boat driver as necessary
- Stay with the crew as they swim the boat back to shore watching for potential problems
- If the boat is serving as a life raft, it may be possible to tow the boat to shore to speed up the process
- If injured parties are taken to shore by the safety boat, stay with the rest of the crew

- If the water is cold, make quick trips to the closest point of land as soon as possible, assisting those who need it most first.

Safety Boat:

- Proceed immediately to the site, blow the horn three times to clear the area of other boats
- Approach the boat from the leeward side, find out from the crew captain or coach the status of injured parties
- Radio the situation to the shore support staff to trigger EMS response as necessary
- Assist the injured parties into the boat as dictated by their injuries
- Drive the injured parties back to shore immediately and leave to the attention of the shore staff and EMS services
- Return to the overturned boat and continue to assist with the crew movement to shore, possibly taking the next group of at-risk (minor injuries, hypothermia) crew members as identified by the crew captain
- When all the crew is on shore and accounted for, the boat may be towed to shore or a position of least danger to other water craft

Shore Staff:

- When the radio response is received, immediately contact EMS as necessary
- Clear the area to allow easy access to the docks and loading areas
- Prepare the first aid kit, blankets and necessary equipment to receive injured parties
- Coordinate first-response actions with the boat safety person (degree of movement, consciousness, CPR, warmth, first-aid) until EMS arrives
- Report all actions to date to the EMS personnel
- If EMS is not necessary, make sure that a team member stays with the injured party until they are home or checked out at the emergency department of the local hospital
- Write up a report documenting the emergency and response for future reference

Other Safety Scenarios to Consider

Man overboard

Medical emergency on water

Medical emergency on land