

BRITISH DRAGON BOAT RACING ASSOCIATION

GUIDE TO SAFETY ON THE WATER (In a Competition Situation)

This guide is primarily for those organising or competing in the sport of Dragon Boat Racing. It covers their responsibilities when participating in a dragon boat event and should therefore be used as a general guide to **'Safety on the Water'** in a competitive situation. In a non-competitive situation it is recommended that all participants (and the activity organiser) also follow the general advice given in this guide. The guide forms part of the BDA Competition Regulations and is to be read in conjunction with both the Competition Regulations and the BDA Rules of Racing.

THE CONDITIONS

Because of the size and design of the Dragon Boat, and the water conditions in which racing takes place, that is placid water, dragon boating is inherently safe and a capsize especially in such conditions, unless the crew is at fault, is a rarity.

However, in any water sport, because of the environment itself, there is always an element of danger. Add to this the folly and impatience of human nature and the ingredients for an accident may eventually come together to the detriment of the sport as a whole. Dragon Boat Racing is no exception to the rule and it is the duty of all who practise the sport - competitors, race organisers, coaches and officials alike - to be aware of the potential dangers inherent in the sport; to be safety conscious - not safety extreme - and to ensure that dragon boating is conducted in a responsible manner.

In adverse weather conditions and when there are strong winds, Dragon Boats can be swamped with water and have been known to capsize, especially when turning sideways on to the prevailing wind or wave pattern. An inexperienced crew in such circumstances can be a major factor in a boat capsizing.

In all water conditions, good or bad, the key to safety is the application of good old **COMMON SENSE** by all those taking part in the activity. Playing around in a Dragon Boat and deliberately capsizing it, even in warm and sunny conditions, can be dangerous to both the crew and other water users alike. In certain circumstances it could be lethal; a Dragon Boat moving at speed through the water cannot easily be stopped and another crew in the water from a capsized boat cannot easily be seen! Crews that cause another boat to capsize when racing, or who ram another boat during a race, will be disqualified from the event.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

Dragon Boat Racing is a 'team sport', each boat carries a crew equivalent to **two soccer teams**. It is not unusual for nearly 100 competitors to be on the water, in one race. The safety of this number of competitors at any one time, is the concern of many people but primarily the **Event Organiser** and the **Chief Official**. However, **'Safety on the Water'** is also the concern of every **Crew Member**. The broad areas of responsibility for safety are:-

The Event Organiser. It is the Event Organiser's responsibility to ensure that adequate safety boats, rescue personnel and Personal Flotation Aids (PFAs) are

obtained for the event; that First Aid cover is provided off the water; that changing rooms, toilets and warm showers are provided and that all temporary structures comply with all regulations on such matters. The Event Organiser shall ensure that Crews are sent basic information on all safety matters appertaining to the competition.

Chief Official. It is the Chief Official's responsibility to ensure that during the racing, all safety boats are in place and briefed; that competitors under 12 wear PFAs and that in adverse weather conditions personal flotation is worn by known weak swimmers and Novice and Junior class crews; and that in all conditions all the safety procedures laid down by the BDA are complied with.

The Crew Manager. It is the Crew Manager's responsibility to ensure that all the crew members can swim to the required standard; that any weak swimmers are provided with PFAs; that the Crew List is completed and lodged with the Race Secretary; that the crew is briefed on the Racing Rules and 'Safety on the Water' and that at all times they are 'fit to race'. This means that it is the Crew Manager's responsibility to ensure that 'socialising' does not adversely affect the performance of the crew on the water.

The Crew Members. It is the responsibility of the crew members to ensure that when racing, they are adequately dressed for the weather conditions and comply with all instructions given to them. Dragon Boating is a social sport too, so don't put the safety of the whole crew in jeopardy through alcohol, thoughtlessness or excessive horseplay.

The Helm (Boat Steerer). The Helm is normally the **Boat Captain**. It is the helm's responsibility to make the final check to ensure that that the boat is water worthy and in racing condition and that all crew members are correctly briefed on boat handling and capsize drills. **When on the water** the Helm shall ensure that collisions with other craft are avoided. In the event of a Crew capsizing, the Helm shall ensure that the capsize drills are correctly carried out and that all competitors are accounted for and rescued

The Safety Officer. It is the Event Safety Officer's responsibility to ensure that all Race Officials and Crew Managers are aware of, and briefed 'on the day' regarding 'Safety on the Water' and **any notifiable diseases, for example Weil's Disease**. The Safety Officer is responsible for ensuring that the Chief Boat Marshal is made aware of any known weak swimmers or competitors with medical conditions that may affect their ability to race. The Safety Officer is responsible for producing a safety plan for the competition, to include a water circulation system for crews going to the start or 'warming up'.

The Chief Boat Marshal. The Chief Boat Marshal shall determine if a crew is 'fit to race' or not and will keep a record of the number of people embarked in each boat, in each race. The Chief Boat Marshal shall ensure that all boats and equipment are in good racing condition before the first race and that they remain in good racing condition throughout the competition.

THE DETAIL

Swimming - The Standard Required. Ideally, all members in a dragon boat crew should be able to swim at least 50 metres, but as a minimum, they must be water competent in cold and moving water and when dressed in light clothing, that is, racing

dress (shorts and vest) plus waterproof top and trousers and light footwear (trainers, flip flops or similar footwear).

Personal Floatation Aids (PFAs) - When to wear them. In a formal competitive event and on a placid water course, in normal summer conditions, and providing that the individual can swim, the BDA Rules of Racing do not require an experienced competitor to wear a Personal Floatation Aid (PFA), such as a Buoyancy Aid. *(This is in line with comparable water sports, such as Rowing and Canoe & Kayak Racing).*

Where local regulations at race site require water users to wear PFAs, all crews will wear them, irrespective of their experience in the sport.

In such cases it is the Event Organisers responsibility to notify crews whether or not the water operator provides PFAs and if NOT, it is the Crew managers responsibility to ensure that the crew has sufficient of their own to cater for any conditions that they may encounter.

However, even in perfect racing conditions, all crew members under the age of 12 years old, must wear a PFA and they should be provided for all other competitors who request them, or at the Crew Manager's discretion, by the Event Organiser.

In an informal competitive event, such as a Charity Race, all competitors are advised to wear PFAs, which should be supplied by the Event Organiser concerned.

In adverse racing or training conditions, especially on open water or rivers, Crew Managers of experienced crews should advise all paddlers to wear PFAs and ensure that weak swimmers and those uncomfortable in such conditions do wear them. In any event Novice and Junior paddlers will wear PFAs in such conditions.

SAFETY ON EMBARKATION

Boat Balance. Before leaving the embarking area, the Boat Captain (normally the Helm) should ensure that the boat is well balanced. That is, that each pair of racers are of similar weight or height and that, generally, the heavier pairs are seated in the boat's middle section. The Boat Captain should know the number of people in the boat.

The Buddy System. The crew should be 'numbered off' from the front of the boat and made aware that they are each responsible for the person they are paired with (across the boat) and that in the event of a capsized, their first responsibility is to ensure that their partner is safe and well.

This is called the 'buddy system' and it gives each person in the boat a specific responsibility for another. The 'Stroke Pair' (first pair – No.2 left and 3 right) in the boat are responsible for the Drummer (1) and the 'rear pair' (last pair) for the Helm (22)

Steadying the Boat A boat will feel 'tippy' especially if the crew is out of balance or moving about in an uncoordinated manner. To steady the boat in such circumstances (and when sideways on to the wind or wave pattern) the crew should be instructed by the Helm to slightly lean out over the side of the boat and place their paddle blades flat on the water, at arms length.

With all of the paddles on the water in this manner (10 either side) the boat is effectively stabilised. This is called a paddle brace and the Helm's command should be '**Brace the Boat**'.

Stopping the Boat. When manoeuvring, turning or racing the boat it may be necessary to stop the boat suddenly, say to avoid a collision with another vessel. It is important that the crew reacts quickly but safely. An unbalanced crew over-reacting can capsize their own boat! **The quickest way to stop a boat is for the crew to do a reverse paddle stroke, that is, everyone takes a backwards stroke with their paddle instead of a forward stroke..**

The initial command should be '**Stop Paddling**' followed immediately by '**Brace the Boat**' if the boat is unstable and there is no immediate danger of a collision. If there is a danger of a collision the command '**Stop the Boat**' should be given and the Crew instructed by the Helm to paddle backwards.

In a race situation when a collision is imminent, the Helm must immediately tell the crew to 'Stop the Boat'. Failure by the Crew to stop the boat in such circumstances will result in disqualification,

SAFETY BOATS

The number of safety boats that an Event Organiser provides will vary according to the number of boats in each race. The chances of more than one boat capsizing in a race are extremely low and therefore, unless the weather conditions are extreme, it should not be necessary to have more than four (4) safety boats in total at any one event.

Each boat should be able to hold at least eight (8) passengers and should not carry more than two crew members, that is, the driver and an assistant to help with any rescues.

At least one safety boat should be on the water for each race. The safety boats should have a low freeboard and hand ropes on it, to allow a person to enter the boat from the water unaided. A throw line, kept on the boat, is also advised.

An added rescue service is to use experienced canoeist Lifeguards, who can provide a number of rescue kayaks, to act as 'one to one' rescuers. The advantage is that they can get in amongst a capsized crew without the fear of injury to the competitors from boat propellers.

CAPSIZED DRAGON BOAT

What to Do. In the event of a Dragon Boat capsizing each pair of paddlers should account for their buddies. The Boat Captain should immediately ensure that all the crew are accounted for by calling out their numbers and noting the response. The crew must initially stay with the boat and leave it in the capsized position. When a boat has over-turned never swim underneath it but in such circumstances, it can be used as a floating platform, provided the crew space themselves evenly around the boat. Alternatively, under the instructions of the Boat Captain the boat may be rolled back to the upright position and used to support the crew. In all situations the Boat Captain should remain in control of the crew and, in a race situation, await the arrival of the

safety boats. The crew should if their paddles are within easy reach, attempt to retrieve them.

On the arrival of the safety boats, the crew should move as directed by the operators of the boats, with the Boat Captain remaining in the water until all members of the crew have been rescued. (If there are insufficient boats to rescue all the crew in one go and the water conditions are kind, or it is shallow, then up to a six crew members can remain with the boat and start to 'swim it' to the nearest shore. This should only be done under the Boat Captain's control and when the swimmers are capable **and not at risk**). After the crew is rescued a safety boat may be used to recover the Dragon Boat.

Unescorted Crews. If there is no safety 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 Boat Captain. If 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 Boat 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.

Recovery of Craft. As soon as the Dragon Boat is alongside the water's edge, all crew members must again be accounted for on the land and any injuries dealt with immediately. The boat, if upturned, may then be turned the right way up (in the water) and bailing out commenced. The boat **SHOULD NOT** be dragged out of the water unless there is only a small amount of water left in it, as this puts a considerable strain on the hull of the boat. Once the boat is almost empty of water it may be lifted on to the bank and checked for damage and all the boat's equipment accounted for.

Practice Drills. It is recommended that crews training regularly together should be introduced to a least one controlled capsize and an unescorted recovery exercise, at an early stage in their training. This practice drill should be set up carefully taking into account the time of year and the weather and water conditions. During such drills all crew members must wear PFAs, irrespective of their competitive experience, general physical fitness or swimming ability and a safety boat should be on standby.

IN CONCLUSION. **Safety is the concern of every crew member and is largely a matter of COMMON SENSE - USE IT! The overall responsibility for the crew off the water is the Crew Manager's and on the water is the Boat Captain's.**

It is every competitor and official's responsibility to ensure that Dragon Boat Racing is conducted as SAFELY AS POSSIBLE - DO IT!

LEPTO SPIROSIS AND WEIL'S DISEASE

It is stressed that Lepto Spirosis and Weil's Disease are both rare but can be caught by anyone engaged in a water sport. The information in this leaflet is published on the basis that 'forewarned is forearmed'. ENJOY YOUR RACE BUT - BEWARE OF LEPTO SPIROSIS and WEIL'S DISEASE.

WHAT IS IT?

Lepto Spirosis is an animal infection. After recovery the animal excretes the organisms in its urine. The bacteria survive for days or even weeks in moist conditions but only for a few hours in salt water. The infection is caught by direct contact with urine or a polluted environment. Bacteria enter through skin abrasions or via the eyes, nose or mouth.

THE ILLNESS

The usual incubation period is 2 to 12 days. Usually a 'flu' like illness occurs which resolves itself in 2 to 3 weeks. There may be fever, severe headache, pains in the back and calf and prostration. A few cases develop jaundice when the condition is known as Weil's Disease. Although death may occur in about 15% of the jaundiced patients, death without jaundice is virtually unknown. Antibiotics during the first few days help in limiting the infection. Many people recover without specific treatment.

WHAT TO DO

If you think that you may have the infection go to your doctor and say that you participate in water sports and think that there may be risk of Lepto Spirosis. The doctor's diagnosis is by clinical suspicion. Blood tests can rarely confirm the illness in time to effect treatment. They may, however, subsequently confirm it.

The microbiologist at the local hospital is the best source of advice.

PREVENTION

1. Cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof plasters.
2. Always wear footwear to avoid cutting your feet.
3. Avoid capsizing drills or swimming in suspect water.
4. Where at all possible, shower soon after Dragon Boating.
5. If in doubt, contact your doctor early.

THE LEVEL OF RISK

On average each year, 9 water sports people contract Lepto Spirosis. The instances of infection are therefore very rare and its deterioration into Weil's Disease even rarer. Weil's Disease is, however, a very serious illness which must be diagnosed and treated swiftly.

REDUCE YOUR RISK BY BEING AWARE!