

Australian Dragon Boat Federation Inc.

Safety Guidelines

Introduction

Accidents in Dragon Boating can and do happen. The consequences can be severe. Following these guidelines will reduce the risk of accidents and minimise the consequences.

Preventing Accidents

Getting in and out of the boat

One of the likely times a boat will capsize is when paddlers are loading or unloading the boat.

- ✓ Safe lifting technique (bend at the knees, not at the back) when lifting and carrying the boats.
- ✓ Make sure enough people are there to carry the boat. Ask other teams for help if needed.
- ✓ Lower the boat slowly when putting it down.
- ✓ Two people hold the front of the boat to steady it, pointing the back of the boat into the water.
- ✓ Paddlers load and unload the boat at the front, 2 at a time.
- ✓ Decide seating positions before getting into the boat.
- ✓ Avoid erratic movements.
- ✓ When seated, put paddles on the water (brace stroke).
- ✓ Do not push the boat while people in it are not seated.
- ✓ The strokes and drummer should enter the boat last and leave it first.
- ✓ When the full team is in the boat, the sweep will call for a head count. This starts with the drummer or the right stroke, number off down the boat. Repeat until everyone knows their number.
- ✓ When leaving shore and arriving carry out a head count.
- ✓ All paddlers should take note of their buddy who will be the person sitting next to them. In some cases, such as the drummer or sweep, paddlers will have 2 buddies. This is the person you will look out for if there is a capsize. Your buddy's safety depends on you.
- ✓ The boat should be balanced left and right before leaving shore.
- ✓ Do not lock or tie yourself into the seat such that you would be stuck if the boat were to capsize.
- ✓ If you cannot swim more than 50m with clothes on, wear a life jacket.

The sweep's responsibility

The sweep is the one who is in control of the boat and has the most responsibility for the safety of the crew.

- ✓ The sweep is the only person that can issue paddling commands that control the boat. The coach can give commands to the paddlers, but when it comes to controlling the boat, the sweep is the one in the best position to make these calls.
- ✓ The sweep must issue commands in a loud voice.
- ✓ Paddlers must be disciplined to listen and obey the sweeps commands.
- ✓ When the sweep calls "Check the boat", "Dig it in" or "Hold water", all the paddlers must dig their paddles vertically into the water to stop the boat. This must be practiced so that a team is able to stop boat in a short distance.
- ✓ When the sweep calls "Brace" or "Paddles flat", all the paddlers must hold the blade of the paddle flat on the water. This stabilises the boat and should be used at all times when not paddling. This is especially necessary when people are moving within the boat and when the water is choppy.
- ✓ The sweep should be aware of boats around them. All boat should be given a wide berth. The sweep should periodically be looking behind them to be aware of any boats approaching from behind.
- ✓ When training at Glebe, teams should generally follow an anti-clockwise path as viewed from above, keeping the land closer on the right.
- ✓ We share the water with rowers. Sweeps should take into account that rowing boats cannot change course quickly or handle choppy water. It should be considered that the rowers do not face the direction they are moving.
- ✓ The sweep is responsible for doing head counts and appointing a second in charge before training.
- ✓ When encountering choppy water, the sweep should endeavour to face the boat into or away from the waves. Not side onto the waves. Only venture where the boat will be stable and the water flat.
- ✓ During races, safety comes before results and collisions should be avoided by sticking to one's lane and stopping the boat if necessary.
- ✓ Sweeps must be trained carefully in their skills and their responsibilities.

- ✓ Teams should not paddle where it is too rough or there is too much boat traffic.

Paddling at night

- ✓ Lights must be used on boats after sundown. The light should be waterproof and brightly visible from all angles.
- ✓ Sweeps should be extra observant for other boats.

Paddling Site Conditions

Each site has its own unique conditions that need to be assessed for risk to paddlers. Many sites are far from clean, and the entry into the water may have dangers (e.g. broken glass and sometimes syringes). Care needs to be taken to avoid infection.

- ✓ Wear shoes when getting into and out of the boat.
- ✓ Disinfect any open wounds that might occur during training, as soon as possible.
- ✓ Try to avoid getting open wounds wet by either covering them with a waterproof dressing or not training until they have healed.

Paddling in the cold

Care needs to be taken when paddling in the cold. It is the coaches' responsibility to ensure that paddlers do not get overly cold and suffer from hypothermia.

- ✓ The coach should train the team for as long as they can keep warm.
- ✓ Paddlers should wear thermals. Unlike lycra, thermals can keep you warm when they are wet.
- ✓ Paddlers should bring warm clothes to change into after training.

Paddling in the heat

- ✓ Paddlers should bring plenty of water to drink during all trainings and race days, especially when it is hot.
- ✓ Sunburn should be avoided by wearing hats and sunscreen.

Capsize Drill

If the boat capsizes, remain calm and follow these steps.

1. Make sure YOU are ok, get your head above water. If you come up under the boat, swim under and to the side of the boat, then surface.
2. Find your buddy. Call out to them as they might be on the other side of the boat. If you cannot find your buddy, alert the people around you. Then search for your buddy.
3. Distribute yourselves around the boat and hold onto it, to stop it from rolling over. Do not swim under the boat to get to the other side, swim around it.
4. The sweep or second in charge will do a head count twice. If people are missing, then search for them.
5. Carefully turn the boat right side up, and swim it to the nearest accessible bank. The whole team should move with the boat. Paddlers should not swim on ahead or be left behind. Do several head counts as you swim the boat.
6. When on shore do another head count. If paddlers are missing then ring "000" for the emergency services.

AusDBF Safety Recommendations

AusDBF recommends its members adhere to the following:

- ◆ Paddlers who cannot swim must wear a life jacket.
- ◆ Lights must be used at night when paddling after dark.
- ◆ Paddlers who suffer from asthma must bring their medication with them on the boat.
- ◆ Teams must not train during lightning, strong winds or adverse conditions.
- ◆ It is recommended all coaches have a senior first aid certificate or higher.
- ◆ Clubs must teach and follow these guidelines.

Being safe takes time and effort but it is worth it. It is every club's responsibility to ensure the safety of their paddlers.