

Paignton Canoe Club Health and Safety Policy

First a quote from BCU Health and Safety guidance notes:

“Not every type of canoeing is a ‘risk’ activity. No adventure sport can ever be totally safe. Respect and admiration is due to those who, knowing their sport and their abilities push back the frontiers of feasibility by tackling ever harder grades of water; or choose to explore in wild and lonely places; or undertake solo paddling be it in one of these contexts, or simply to find their own level of self fulfillment.

We do not agree with those who regard the occasional inevitable loss of life in these circumstances as disastrous for the sport. Nor that those who choose these outlets - knowing what they are at - are acting in an irresponsible manner. Far from it. They are keeping alive - in fact they are furthering - the essential spirit in mankind to advance against the elements.

We are, however, faced with a dilemma. We all want and demand ‘freedom’. In reality, however, if the exercise of that ‘freedom’ causes us harm, a growing number of people then want to apportion blame. Some would seek recompense against those who permitted or set up the activity. The media joins in this process. In consequence, incidents are distorted beyond recognition, and the dividing line between freedom of action, and responsible provision, becomes difficult to define.

Numerous examples of this process can be cited, sometimes leading to increased legislation. Some forms of canoeing have an inherent risk factor. Regrettably, when a tragedy does occur, the media tends to react out of all proportion to the actual very low incidence of fatalities within the sport. The difficulty for the Union, as the Governing Body, is to tread the border zone of taking reasonable precautions, yet retaining the adventurous nature of those aspects of the sport which carry an element of danger.

Our order of priority in deciding whether action of any kind should be taken, is:

- 1. That no one should lose their life or be seriously injured, if this could have been avoided through the implementation of simple warnings or safeguards.*
- 2. The BCU and its coaches work to ensure that those taking part in canoeing are able to do so protected and kept safe from harm while they are with staff, coaches and / or volunteers. This is particularly true in respect of children and vulnerable adults.*
- 3. That unnecessary adverse publicity should not accrue to the sport, hastening the day when further restrictive legislation may be applied, or giving excuse to those who would even now use any reason to bar our activity.*
- 4. That where reasonably possible, grounds for a claim that would invoke our insurance policy be avoided, in order to ensure the continuance of this benefit as a final compensation to an injured party, at a reasonable cost to the membership. “*

<http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/media/pdf/Health%20%20Safety%20Policy.pdf> (referenced Sept 2012)

Paignton Canoe Club exists in order to stimulate interest in canoeing locally, provide regular opportunities for its members to enjoy all aspects of this activity in a way that is safe and fun for all, encourage interest in everyone; male or female, young or old, novice or experienced.

The above BCU summary position on H&S expresses well the dilemma we face. Ultimately Paddlesports always carry an element of risk. Accidents can and occasionally do, happen. Individuals should make their own judgments, and not put others at risk by being overconfident. Do not be pushed by peer pressure, misplaced personal pride, or other influences too far outside your comfort zone. Be prepared to walk round an obstacle, or pull out of an activity if it is too much. The Club and it’s members will support your decision.

But do push the boundaries and grow in your ability and experience.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the PCC Operating Procedure and PCC Child and Vulnerable Adult Policies.

The BCU policy should be used as the ultimate H&S guidance, but below are some points particular to all Paignton Canoe Club activities.

- Any club activity shall have at minimum three boats. At least one participant shall be experienced in the conditions expected for that activity.
- For any club activity there shall be a Trip Leader. **THE TRIP LEADER IS THE MOST EXPERIENCED PERSON PRESENT.** Qualification, status within the club or nominal title of 'trip leader' are not relevant. Incidents happen because of a lack of experience, experience to foresee the problem or deal with it when it arises. The trip leader is also responsible for the quality of the trip. Good trip leading is not only about safety but about the quality of the trip itself; a boring but safe trip is still a bad trip. However a trip that carried on when it should have been aborted is a very bad trip.
- The Trip Leader shall judge whether flares, radio, tow lines, navigation aids (e.g. compass, map, chart, GPS etc) etc should be taken on the trip.
- All members of the group have a responsibility for their own and everyone else's safety and enjoyment, but shall accept the role of the Trip Leader is to lead.
- All participants will ensure that the Trip Leader is aware of any medical condition that might be significant for or during the planned activity. If in doubt, talk.
- Individuals should judge their own competence regarding personal equipment, such as rescue knives, tow-line, throw lines, slings, karabiners, first-aid kit, etc
- There should be at least one person competent for the conditions in every five members of the group
- If an activity includes people under 18years or are vulnerable then
 - The parents/carers shall be contactable in an emergency
 - There is a clearly understood drop-off and pick up organised
 - There shall be at least two adults competent for the anticipated conditions in every five participants of the group
 - At least one of these adults shall be CRB checked
- All participants shall be capable of swimming 25 metres wearing the clothing and equipment they expect to be wearing for the activity.
- When in the swimming pool, sailing club or other establishments, all local normal requirements for behaviour, safety, fire and accident procedures shall be observed.
- For pool football type sports helmets and buoyancy aids are to be worn
- On open water (includes sea, lake, estuary, slow moving or white-water) buoyancy aids are to be worn. Whistles should be attached by short cord.
- On white-water, surfing or where rock hopping, caving or similar activities are anticipated helmets are to be worn.
- When twilight or nighttime activities are planned or considered possible then paddlers should have a light designed for use on water.
- For open and white-water paddling clothing appropriate to the anticipated conditions shall be worn. Generally this is likely to mean either a wet-suit and a windproof (cag) or dry suit. Additional insulation layers appropriate to the activity and conditions should be worn. Head gear should be consciously considered, for sun, cold and mechanical protection. Foot gear should also be appropriate. This is especially important for white-water activities, where movement across rocks for cover or rescue may be rapidly required.
- Boats should be seaworthy, supplementary buoyancy (airbags or foam) and be appropriate for the expected activity
- It is the driver's responsibility to check that any load is secured safely to a vehicle or trailer under his/her care. Bow and stern straps are recommended.
- It is the driver's responsibility to ensure the vehicle is roadworthy, legal, taxed and insured.
- Use of the trailer shall be restricted to a named list of drivers (be aware that there are driving license restrictions introduced for people passing their test since 2006).