

DCC risk assessment – paddles from the DWSC



Assessor:	Joff Hayes	Date:	8 April 2026
Approver:	David Rich	Date:	10 April 2026
Next review due:	By 31 March 2027	All ongoing DCC risk assessments should be updated as required but in any event should be formally reviewed between January and March every year, to be valid until 31 March of the following calendar year.	

Description of assessment:	Generic risk assessment for general club paddles on the River Deben from the Deben Watersports Centre. (Please see notes at end of risk assessment regarding the equipment to be carried)
Location details:	The River Deben from the upper tidal limits above Wilford Bridge to Waldringfield.

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing to control the risks?	What further action do you need to take to control the risks (and by when)?
Wind & Tide	Paddlers, Coaches	The Deben is a tidal river. Conditions can change significantly if the tide changes, especially if there is a significant wind. Coaches consider the wind and the tide when deciding on the direction and distance to be paddled. Coaches should adjust the paddle if conditions change.	
Collision with river objects (Buoys, Piers etc)	Paddlers, Coaches	Paddlers briefed to pass obstruction down river. Obstructions highlighted on the water where appropriate Route planned to avoid significant hazards	
Other river users	Paddlers, Coaches, other river users	Paddlers instructed to be aware of other river users Moving clear of the main channel early when larger craft are passing	

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Loss of Paddler	Paddlers	Initial head count and regular checks Coaches position in and control of the group to prevent issues arising In inclement weather and low light conditions keep the group closer together and if necessary implement strategies to keep control (e.g. Numbering, Buddying etc.) If there are multiple coaches in one group then one needs to be in overall charge. For larger groups consider a nominated lead and tailend paddler (not necessarily a coach) for effective group control. If multiple groups are on the water at the same time then special care needs to be taken to ensure that paddlers are not lost between groups and the coach leading each group maintains control of all of their group.	
Grounding	Paddlers	Grounding is generally not a big issue in a kayak / canoe. It can become a bigger issue if it leads to the group getting separated, especially in conditions of poor visibility. Extra group control is maintained when there is poor visibility.	
Capsize / Drowning	Paddlers, Coaches	All paddlers must wear a correctly fitted buoyancy aid (Coaches check novices and give advice) Capsize & reentry practised as part of beginners courses. Closer supervision of novice paddlers Coaches are all trained in capsize technique. Practice sessions in the pool and on the river for this eventuality	Conduct regular practice rescue sessions for coaches – at least once per season
Exhausted paddler	Paddlers	Activity choice appropriate for the group Route choice should take the tide and wind conditions into account so that typically it is a “harder” paddle out compared to back in	

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Equipment failure	Paddlers, Coaches	All club equipment is checked periodically Coaches to check newcomers' personal equipment Participants to conduct an equipment check during the pre-paddle brief	
Pollution and water quality	Paddlers, Coaches	Ensure that any participants with open wounds have them covered or don't participate Advise on the potential health hazards Advise on hand washing and bathing soon after immersion Avoid intentional capsizes when there is heavy rain. Ask about open wounds in the pre-brief	
Slips, Trips and Falls	Paddlers, Coaches, Others	Regular maintenance of the steps at the club house General housekeeping of the clubhouse (internal and external areas)	
Sprains, Strains and soft tissue injuries	Paddlers, Coaches, Others	Training and guidance on lifting crafts correctly Encouraged to paddle correctly with good technique	
Minor injury	Paddlers, Coaches	Identify any medical issues any participants may have at the pre-paddle briefing All deployable coaches are First aid trained	
Hypothermia	Paddlers, Coaches	All participants briefed on the weather conditions Advised on type of clothing to be worn Adjustment to clothing as required	

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Hyperthermia / heat exhaustion	Paddlers, Coaches	All participants briefed on the weather conditions Advised on type of clothing to be worn (including sunscreen and hats). Adjustment of clothing as required Adjust pace of paddle and frequent breaks as required Drinks carried by participants as required	
Serious injury / incapacitation	Paddlers, Coaches	Identify any medical issues any participants may have at the pre-paddle briefing Mobile phone carried in a waterproof bag/pouch. Coach and assistants should know where the getout is. All deployable coaches are first aid trained	

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Notes:

- a) Items which MUST be carried by the group (usually the lead coach):
- Phone in Watertight bag – Number to be published on the Leaders WhatsApp Group
 - First Aid Kit to include reflective blanket
 - A Tow System (Could be the ability to push the paddler in distress or could be a tow belt)
 - Torch (if paddling at dusk/night)
- b) Optional Items – usually carried for trips further away from base or for longer trips. Coaches should make an active decision about which items are appropriate for any given trip:
- Split Paddles (optional depending on the trip)
 - Group shelter (optional depending on trip)
 - Throw Line (optional depending on the trip)
 - Knife (to be carried if Throw Line carried. Else optional.)
 - Spare food, hot drinks and extra warm clothing (optional – generally for more challenging trips)
 - Boat Repair Kit (optional depending on the trip)

This risk assessment was first documented in November 2024 and has been regularly reviewed and updated since then.