



Safety Principles for Paddlers

The purpose of the Deben Canoe Club is to share enjoyable paddles in a friendly environment under the guidance of experienced leaders. Safety is paramount. Participants must take responsibility for their own safety and that of others.

In this section of the club safety framework we set out some general guidance which we hope ordinary club members will find useful.

The first principle for safe paddling is to operate in a cooperative and supportive environment. Always act in accordance with the club's code of conduct. The club has zero tolerance for any form of harassment, abusive behaviour, bullying or bigotry. Any club member or guest who witnesses such behaviour should report it as soon as possible to the event leader, the club welfare officers, or to any other member of the club committee.

Safety principles for group paddles

- have a change of clothing either in your boat or at least at the get-out, for example in the clubhouse or in your car, so that if you do get wet and cold you can get warm again as soon as possible
- do not paddle if you have any open cuts or wounds which may be exposed to river water – only paddle if such cuts are covered with a secure waterproof dressing to minimise the risk of water borne infection. (See the note on Weil's disease, below)
- similarly, avoid swallowing any river water if you possibly can
- wash your hands as soon as possible after completing a paddle, and certainly before eating or drinking. Wash the rest of yourself when practical
- do not paddle if you feel weak or unwell
- do not paddle if you are unsure if you are fit and skilled enough to complete the proposed paddle – the leader will explain what is planned before the group approaches the water
- you must follow the club's alcohol policy, see below
- always wear a properly fitted and secured buoyancy aid – this is mandatory on all club paddles
- check your own boat, paddle and other equipment carefully before approaching the water
- if you have any doubts or uncertainties about your equipment, discuss with a leader as soon as possible, ideally long before the group approaches the water. Experienced paddlers may also be able to provide reassurance – conversely, please do not attempt to provide advice to other paddlers unless you are absolutely sure your advice is correct

- dress for the expected conditions, and for all possible adverse conditions. Layers are good. If there is any chance of rain or cold, then take a cagoule in your boat even if you don't want to wear it at the outset. A cagoule will keep you warm, or at least warmer, if you do get wet and cold. Dress for yourself – don't be misled by others going out in a thin short sleeved t-shirt when you would be more comfortable in three warm layers! Don't overlook the impact of the change of seasons – once we move into autumn it can be much colder at the end of a paddle than the beginning
- make a decision on whether to dress for the possibility of immersion – don't wear clothes which will be heavy or chafe when wet (for example, jeans)
- footwear should be designed to protect toes and stay on while walking through deep mud – flip flops and flimsy 'wet shoes' are not suitable
- make sure any of your valuables which would be damaged by water are secure in waterproof bags
- always follow the instructions of leaders, coaches and club officials, both on and off the water. Wilfully ignoring such instructions may lead to a report to the club committee, who may impose sanctions up to and including expulsion from the club
- if you observe anything on or off the water that you think the leader should know about, then tell them as soon as practical
- offer to help others getting in or out of the water, but only if you are sure you can help and not hinder
- be considerate of others in the group – try not to crowd their boats or impede their paddles, try not to splash them, etc.
- when paddling in a group, stay together with the rest of the group! If you are at the head of the group please check regularly to see if the group has become spread out a long way behind you. If so, then slow down. If you find yourself falling behind the group, shout out for the group to slow down – this should be rare, since the leaders will be alert to this and should slow the group down themselves before it becomes a problem
- remember, the further you are from the group, the slower leaders will be able to assist you in an emergency
- do not move out of sight of the rest of the group. If there is an incident and you are out of sight, then the leaders will be slow to attend and assist, with potentially very serious consequences
- if you find yourself struggling to maintain the pace then let a leader know as soon as possible. Any of us can paddle a surprisingly long way, provided we go slowly enough. Conversely, pushing yourself even slightly beyond your comfort zone can quickly lead to exhaustion. Leaders are always happy to slow the group down if you need it, and much prefer that to learning that you are too exhausted to continue when they are a long way from the planned exit point
- in the event of an incident on the water, don't panic. If you are not directly involved, and are unconfident of your ability to help, then move aside and form a close group with the others, which should turn to face into the elements. If necessary, shout to make sure leaders are aware of the problem

- if you are directly involved in an incident, don't panic. Shout for assistance. If you find yourself in the water, keep calm, exit from your boat, and if possible use your boat as a float. Once you are back in control, consider if it would be safe to check to see if you can actually touch the river bed with your feet! Leaders and other experienced paddlers will assist as soon as they can
- if you find yourself in difficulty, don't panic. Try to avoid creating difficulties for other paddlers. For example, if you are capsizing, resist the urge to wildly grab at another paddler, lest you should pull them over into the water too. Literally nobody wants that
- if someone else is in difficulty, do what you can to help, but do not impede leaders on the spot. Collecting stray equipment which is floating away is always useful and rarely inappropriate
- always report any issues or problems with club equipment or boats, either during or at least at the end of the paddle
- always seek to improve your paddling skills and knowledge, by discussion with leaders, coaches and experienced paddlers, and by participating in formal training courses
- practise recovering from a capsize regularly at a club pool session. There is little to fear from going for a swim when you are part of a group, provided you know what to do and so don't need to panic
- if you have any concerns about any aspect of the club, whether safety, welfare, equipment, behaviour, whatever, please report them to any club official so that we can take action

Additional safety principles for independent paddles

At the start of your paddling adventures, the club strongly recommends paddling in a group led by suitably qualified and experienced leaders. This minimises the risk of incidents and minimises the adverse consequences of any incidents.

As your skills and experience develop, we recognise that members can and do wish to paddle away from the club on occasion and offer the following suggestions for your safety.

Of course, the club does not accept any liability for any loss or injury when paddling, however caused, and whether or not you are following this advice:

- it is recommended not to paddle alone. A group of three is safer than a group of two, and a larger group is even better
- always take an appropriate safety kit – consider: spare paddle, mobile phones (in waterproof bags!), tow rope, knife, whistle, first aid kit, survival bags, group shelter, repair kit, change of clothing in waterproof bags
- tell someone else where you are going and when you are expected back. This won't help if someone is drowning, but could be very useful if, for example, you all find yourselves stuck on a remote mudbank on a falling tide as night falls!
- on a paddle with the same get-in and get-out, ideally paddle against the strongest element, wind or current, on the way out. It makes the return easier
- have a plan, and make a risk assessment. The club's safety framework includes detailed advice on risk assessment

- consider the club's checklists for leaders and coaches in the club's safety framework, these should also be useful for anyone else planning or leading a paddle
- be cautious even in water you are very familiar with
- be much more cautious on water you are less familiar with – what are the additional hazards which you do not usually encounter?
- what is the weather forecast? What is the worst weather that could happen? Do not hesitate to abandon a paddle if the weather is (or could be) too bad
- what will you do if something goes wrong? Where can you make an emergency get-out if you have to? What will you do then?
- if someone gets wet, how will they stay warm?
- is the proposed paddle achievable by the least experienced paddler? What if the weather changes or currents are stronger than anticipated?
- what will you do if the most experienced paddler gets into difficulty?
- what will you do if any paddler can't continue?
- if you do have to summon help, from friends or the emergency services, you need to be able to accurately identify your location – for example OS Locate, 'what three words'
- learn how to send locations by text from your own phone, in case mobile phone reception is poor

Weil's Disease (leptospirosis)

Weil's Disease is a bacterial disease that affects both humans and animals and is caught by exposure to water contaminated with the urine of infected animals. It is most prevalent in slow moving water and canals, particularly after heavy rains when the animal's urine gets washed into water courses. It can be contracted through the skin, especially the eyes or nose, or through broken skin. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache, chills, muscle aches and vomiting; and may include jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), red eyes, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, or a rash. If not treated the patient could develop kidney damage, meningitis, liver failure and respiratory distress. The patient can become sick anywhere between two days to four weeks after exposure. Illness is confirmed by laboratory testing of a blood or urine sample.

Paddlers are most at risk if they have open wounds or cuts or if they swallow lots of water. Prevention is by coverage of breaks of skin with a waterproof plaster or wearing a nose clip if practising capsize drills or rolling. If any member is ill after paddling with the symptoms described above, they should seek medical attention explaining that they may have had contact with the *Leptospira* bacteria. If the doctor does not offer one, demand a blood test.

Club alcohol policy

The following rules apply to all participants in club on-the-water events:

- for formal coaching sessions no alcohol is to be consumed before or during any session
- no alcohol is to be consumed before or during any paddle under Moderate or Advanced Water conditions
- no alcohol is to be consumed before or during any paddle by any participant under eighteen years of age

For social club paddles under Sheltered (or Very Sheltered) Water conditions the following rules apply to all participants over the age of 18:

- paddlers may consume alcoholic beverages on the water, during meal breaks and also at rest stops where there is a pub
- any alcoholic beverage brought onto the water is to be declared to the leader-in-charge at the pre-paddle briefing
- paddlers are to ensure that they remain within drink drive limits, cognisant that factors like weight, age, metabolism, food consumption and other individual factors can influence how quickly alcohol is processed by the body.
- paddlers are to ensure (and leaders are to monitor) that they remain properly hydrated throughout the paddle and that alcoholic beverages are not their only form of hydration during full day paddles, paddles on hot days or if paddling conditions are arduous. The leader-in-charge has the authority to prevent the consumption of alcohol if, in their opinion, the paddler's hydration strategy is insufficient to allow them to consume the alcohol without adverse effect to their paddling ability
- notwithstanding any of the above, any leader-in-charge may stipulate that no alcohol is to be brought or consumed on their particular on-the-water event, either within the trip instructions and / or on the day