



Falmouth Canoe Club Safety Guide

Updated: 30/03/2025



Overview

In accordance with British Canoeing requirements, Falmouth Canoe Club (the Club) has undertaken to:

1. Appoint a Club Paddlesport Safety Officer to lead on safe practice
2. Produce and maintain a club risk assessment that covers all activities of the club
3. Publish a club safety policy
4. Complete and maintain a safe paddling plan to guide members on safe practice
5. Establish club paddling rules that outline what is, and what is not appropriate behaviour
6. Provide a safe environment for their members and guests to enjoy paddlesport
7. Provide members with education and training in assessing risk and safe practice
8. Take action if its members fail to follow the club's safety plan and rules
9. Encourage members to be accountable for safety and to report all incidents
10. Liaise with other water users and stakeholders to ensure that none are put at risk
11. Complete an annual safety review and implement changes that arise.

Safety Officer

The Safety Officer is appointed annually at our Annual General Meeting (AGM). The appointed Safety Officer's role is in an advisory capacity whose work is led by the Club Committee (the Committee). It is important to note that the 'duty of care' responsibility still rests with the Club Committee as a whole and not solely on the shoulders of the Safety Officer.

Safety Policy

Everyone at the Club is expected to ensure their actions or lack of action do not compromise the safety of themselves or others. Safety is a culture which runs throughout all of our activities and is a normal part of everyday thinking and practice. It is embedded in the way our club works. We take responsibility for our own safety, both on and off the water, ensuring that our actions, both on and off the water, do not put others at risk.

We look for everyone to use their specific skill, knowledge and experience to protect others from any foreseeable risks. In law we have a "Duty of Care" to others. This means that we owe a duty to our 'neighbours' not to cause them injury by our negligent acts and omissions.

A dynamic approach to decision making is taken which considers the environment, individual abilities and the activity being undertaken.

The recording of decisions is undertaken by the Committee. Likewise the reporting of incidents to the Committee and to British Canoeing is seen as a way of sharing experience that can be used to inform future practice, identify issues and help keep others safe. The Club considers 'an incident' to be an unplanned and uncontrolled event that could lead to injury, property damage, or other loss. A proportionate and dynamic approach is applied.



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Safe Paddling Plan

The Club adopts the Kayaking Safety Guidance, produced by the RNLI, as our overarching Paddle Plan. Every Club Event should ensure paddlers / the group:

1. Always Carry A Means Of Calling For Help
2. Wear Buoyancy Aids
3. Check The Weather And Tides
4. Tell Someone Else Where We Are Going And When We Will Be Back
5. Wear Appropriate Clothing For The Conditions And The Trip
6. Get Some Training And Paddle Within Our Limits

Further information can be found using the hyperlinks at the end of this document in order to be fully aware of the way to keep safe on and off the water and look after others.

Club Paddling Rules

Club events are for permanent and temporary club members only. Everyone should book events using the Club Booking system so we can monitor numbers, skills and ability of those attending. The purpose of these rules is to allow all members to enjoy paddling and do so safely when they are with the Club. Some are concerned with general behaviour to promote an atmosphere where everyone can feel comfortable. Some are concerned with safety – canoeing is an activity that carries risks, and we all need to be aware of them and how to reduce or manage them.

1. While at club sessions or events, members shall behave so as to promote the good name of the Club. In particular, members should:

- Cooperate fully with reasonable requests from the Event Leader, Deputy Event Leader and Committee Members.
- Control their temper and be considerate and respectful towards other participants and spectators.
- Wear appropriate kit (see Kit List).
- Take care of all property belonging to the Club and others, and be responsible for their own kit. Report defects in equipment immediately to the Committee.
- Be on time and prepared for events and training sessions and not leave without informing the Event Leader.

2. No one may canoe alone.

3. Members must paddle only when fit to do so safely, and specifically not while under the influence of alcohol, medication or other drugs.

4. Enjoy / Respect / Protect our natural environment - www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk/2023/11/enjoy-respect-protect-leaflet/



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Pre-Event

All club events must be approved by the Club Committee. If planned at short notice, approval should be gained via sending event details to committee@falmouthcc.org.uk. An Event Leader and Event Deputy should be identified for each event and they should apply the dynamic approach to decision making to consider the environment, individual abilities and the activity being undertaken. They should use the following checklist:

1. Review the weather and tidal forecast 48/24/1 hour prior to event , including wind direction / speed, tide times / swell and daylight hours.
2. Detail the route to be taken, including timescale, landmarks and key hazards.
3. Notify the Coastguard beforehand, if undertaking training exercises (capsize / towing etc), to avoid false call-outs (<https://paddleuk.org.uk/sea-kayaking/>)
4. Run through and check personal and group kit.
5. Cover safety procedures, including rescue and capsize.
6. Review paddle skills, proficiencies and any prior medical conditions of all attendees and record the number of attendees
7. Run through visual signals - raised vertical paddle = GO / raised horizontal paddle = STOP / raised horizontal paddle x3 times = GATHER TOGETHER / waving of your hand or paddle = EMERGENCY and any trip / condition-specific signals.

During the Event

The Event Leader and Event Deputy should ensure attendees keep together and they apply the dynamic approach to decision making to consider the environment, individual abilities and the activity being undertaken. When travelling, the Event Leader should be towards the front of the group and the Event Deputy towards the back. There should be regular breaks to re-group, check on attendees and identify features / hazards for the next stage. Leaders should follow the CLAP Leadership Principles - Communication, Line of sight, Avoidance and Positioning." <https://britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/wp-content/files/01042017LeadershipInTheChallengingWorldOfPaddlesportsV1-1Dec21.pdf>

Post-Event

The Event Leader and Event Deputy should ensure everyone is out of the water and that the kit is checked, washed and stored. Any damaged kit should be identified and highlighted to the Committee. Any incidents should be reported on the Incident Report Form (stored in the Kit Cage). Comments, feedback and suggestions should be sought from the attendees to improve future events and report back to the Committee.



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Event Risks and Controls

The following risks and controls have been identified for all club events.

Hazard Description	Who might be harmed?	How may the risk be adequately controlled?	What further action may be required?	Review comment / date
DROWNING	Paddlers	Wear buoyancy aid. Instruction in capsize procedures at all beginners' nights. Relevant supervision for novices.	Buoyancy aids tested annually. Induction sessions for beginners / new members. Coaches check buoyancy aids are correctly fitted. Regular checks on equipment during season. Beginners wear spraydecks only after they have performed a wet exit.	
HYPOTHERMIA	Paddlers	Advised on clothing to wear. Advised on sea temp range from 6-17C. Cags carried, if not worn. Space blankets carried.	Continuous dynamic risk assessment.	
SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS	Paddlers & others	Shoes to be worn by all paddlers. Warn paddlers of debris / slip hazards on the slipway area, storage area and kit areas. Use head torches in the dark.	Check slipway, storage and kit areas and warn of any identified risks that can't be mitigated.	
SPRAINS, STRAINS AND SOFT TISSUE INJURIES	Paddlers & others	Training to lift kayaks correctly. Two people to lift kayaks. Encouraged to paddle correctly by coaches. Apply caution when moving the trailer.	Ongoing training and regular checks of procedures Appropriate checks on storage facilities. Those with existing back trouble, alternative arrangements can be made, or others can help.	
POLLUTION AND WATER QUALITY	Paddlers	Review pollution and Environmental Agency pollution reporting.	Avoid intentional capsize in poor conditions, near diesel areas or sewage outlets. Advised to bathe soon after immersion.	



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OTHER HARBOUR USERS	Paddlers & other users	Paddlers instructed to be aware of other harbour / sea users and how to take appropriate action (collision risk, bow waves). Paddlers to stick in small tight groups minimising distance between paddlers when crossing the entrance to Falmouth Harbour.	Informed of other sea users and location. Paddlers to practice good group management and behaviour from others and when coached will be encouraged to consider other craft while planning and undertaking journeys.	
SURF/ SWELL AT SEA	Paddlers	Helmets to be worn in surf, swell (3-4 ft +) and rockhopping. Groups to be briefed about maintaining safe distances and rights of way. Keep to seaward side of boats if swimming. Only surf in conditions you can handle.	Appropriate skill and awareness training. Trip planning to avoid tidal races, except for advanced paddlers comfortable with moving water (3* standard +)	
HEAD INJURIES FROM SEABED AND DEBRIS	Paddlers	Helmets to be worn in surf, swell (3-4 ft +) and rockhopping. 1x First aid kit to be carried by Event Leader.	Regular checks as part of on-site maintenance. Appropriate training for off-site visits.	
INJURY FROM VEHICLES ON SLIPWAY	Paddlers	Brief beginners and groups to be cautious of moving around the slipway area.	Be extremely cautious when boats are being launched. Harbourmaster's office ensures that no cars or other traffic use the car park and/or slipway	
RESCUE/ EVACUATION	Paddlers	Carry mobile phones / radios with each group. Carry group safety kit including first aid kit and spare warm clothes. Contact Coastguard to inform of training that may result in false call-outs.	Personal Location Beacon (PLB) carried wherever possible in addition to mobile phones / radios.	
ROCKS, TREES, MAN MADE FEATURES	Paddlers	Keep groups away from dangerous features and be aware of passenger ferries and other hazards.	Take extreme caution around the end of docks in surf/swell.	
ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION	Paddlers	All paddlers must take responsibility for ensuring they are not drinking and becoming a liability.	People who persistently put themselves and others at risk will be asked to leave the club.	



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HAZARDOUS WILDLIFE	Paddlers	Affected by weaver fish (poisonous spines on gill covers and dorsal fin), jellyfish (stings), on landing - dogs (scratch, bite) / other animals	Group to be vigilant to potential risks and communicate to others to avoid.	
WEATHER, TIDE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS	Paddlers	Weather forecast checked before departure. Leader to know tide time / swell / wind direction. If paddling near areas likely or known for rips, ensure knowledge of them is communicated. Beginners' nights cancelled in 15mph + winds. Suncream, water bottles and hats for hot weather.	Take throwlines, throwtows on every trip for rafting / towing. For longer trips, simple landings (escapes) along the route will be identified. Hand signals to be shown prior to departure.	
PADDLING IN DARKNESS	Paddlers & other seagoing craft	Torches to be carried from Sept-Oct. Groups stick together in dark.	Consider timing to avoid night time events.	
INJURY FROM KIT FAILURE	Paddlers	Paddlers to be briefed to report any damaged equipment found on club nights. Kit Officer to maintain records and mark faulty kit. Correct storage of boats with cockpit facing down on the racks to avoid filling with rainwater.	Kit to be checked regularly. Kit inventory kept up-to-date in google drive. Check storage of all boats at the end of Club Events.	
GROUP BEHAVIOUR AND MEDICAL CONDITIONS	Paddlers	Explain all group members have a duty to keep each other safe on club trips.	Qualified coaches have first aid certificate, first aid kits (x2) to be carried on club paddles. Those with serious conditions should consult their GP.	
CARDIAC ARREST	Paddlers	Seek urgent medical attention (dial 999).	Defibrillator located next to public toilets.	

Recording of Incidents

Any incidents, accidents, injuries or near misses are recorded in the Club Accident Book (stored in the Kit Cage) and are held for a minimum of 5 years. All incidents are reported to the next available Committee Meeting and any actions to implement changes are considered. Reporting to British Canoeing is considered at the Committee Meeting / Minuted.

Annual Safety Review

The Annual Safety Review is reported at our Annual General Meeting. This reports on the application of this document, reports any accidents / safety concerns and identifies actions to implement any changes that arise.



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Kit List

Paddlers should wear/use/carry:

- buoyancy aid
- paddle
- spraydeck
- cagoule: wind and waterproof
- sun hat / warm hat
- food and drink
- suncream
- torch

In addition to the equipment described above, paddlers should consider carrying:

- whistle
- personal first aid kit
- towline
- knife: required when a towline is carried
- map and compass
- mobile phone / radio / Personal Location Beacon
- helmet (moving water / rockhopping)

For advanced paddles, paddlers should consider carrying:

- spare paddles
- pump
- repair kit
- emergency communication: VHF (requires licence) and flares

Further Guidance

British Canoeing Paddle Safer Guidance

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/uploads/documents/Paddlesafer-V5.2.pdf>

RNLI Guidance

https://rnli.org/-/media/rnli/downloads/48741_kayaking_leaflet_final_sept_19_aw-lores.pdf?rev=edf9923bd2ed41ecaa2c1b394c842a0d&hash=9CFC2CC8ACFD7925DB8733E3BBE9DBAC