

# ROYAL CANOE CLUB

## Safety Policy

Note: Throughout this policy the word 'canoe' is taken to include all types of canoe, kayak and other watercraft and boats used by club members. The word 'canoeist' is taken to mean anyone using a canoe, kayak or other watercraft and boats at the club.

### 1. GENERAL POLICY

The Royal Canoe Club demands its members take a responsible attitude toward their safety and the safety of others at all times when using its premises or representing the club.

### 2. EMERGENCY SERVICES

First Aid Boxes and defibrillators are located in both clubhouses.

The nearest hospital for serious injuries is Kingston Hospital. There is a small accident and emergency unit in Teddington but this is only open during the day.

If you have reason to believe an injury may be severe and urgent medical assistance may be required, dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.

### 3. THE MAIN RISKS

The main risks to canoeists paddling from Royal Canoe Club are:

- collision
- hypothermia
- drowning
- water-borne illness

Other related problems that require planning and consideration are:

- damage to club or personal equipment
- spoiling the enjoyment of the river for others

### 4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CANOEIST SAFETY

#### Buoyancy aids

These are provided by the club for use by members during formal instruction sessions. British Canoeing Sprint and Marathon Racing Rules require the use of buoyancy aids in certain situations. Any Junior member must assume buoyancy aids are required unless told otherwise by their coach, each time they get onto the water.

The parent/guardian of all junior members are required to give written permission for a junior member to paddle without a buoyancy aid. All junior members who have not yet achieved marathon racing division 6 or above will be required to wear a buoyancy aid at all times on the water and regardless of parental permission being held.

Where a junior paddle has reached marathon racing division 6 or above, they may paddle without a buoyancy aid if written parental consent is held. As the coach has responsibility for water safety they can override parental permission and insist on the wearing of a buoyancy aid should they feel that it is necessary.

### **Junior members (under 18)**

A declaration of safety is required from the parent or guardian to confirm that the junior member can swim 25 metres in light clothing without swimming aids. This ability may be tested before a junior is allowed to join the club.

Juniors under the age of 14 are only allowed on the water when accompanied by a qualified coach (Level 1 or higher). Juniors must remain in sight of the coach at all times whilst on the water.

On attaining a division 6 or higher standard and consistently demonstrating good safety skills and attitude, a Level 2 or higher club coach may permit a Junior over 14 years old to paddle with other club groups and be allowed on the water out of sight of a coach on a session by session basis.

### **Adult members (18+)**

Adults are deemed responsible for their own safety. The Club encourages people to develop the skills & competence to be independent users of waterways. Paddlesport is an activity with some inherent hazards and an important part of the sport is to be able to recognise these hazards and to use judgement as to activities and equipment appropriate for the conditions and the participants. By joining RCC, a member acknowledges these hazards and this approach, and agrees to use their judgement as to if, when & how to go out on the water. RCC coaches may offer advice to other members but will not be the judge of other adults' safety. It is the member's responsibility to seek advice where they are unsure. Therefore members use the club equipment and partake in paddlesport at their own risk. If the club judges a member to be reckless, disciplinary action may be taken.

## **5. CLUB EQUIPMENT**

Within an organised or coached session, canoeing equipment is under the control of the coach.

Each time a club canoe is used, checks must be made on the condition and position of seats, footrest, tiller, rudder and buoyancy to ensure that all are secure and properly set before launching.

Any damage should be reported to coaches or the Harbour Master ([harbourmaster@royalcanoecub.com](mailto:harbourmaster@royalcanoecub.com)) so it can be repaired.

Club boats are not to be taken away from the premises for use elsewhere except with the permission of the Harbour Master. A fee may be payable for such use and members are entirely responsible for any damage caused to or by the canoe while it is in their care.

A number of canoes are 'reserved' for priority use by Juniors under the control of coaches and instructors. The coach or instructor is responsible for ensuring that the boats to be used in the session or event are safe to use.

Crew boats (doubles and fours) are available for use in competitions. Permission must be obtained from the Harbour Master before these canoes are used in competition.

## **6. AVOIDANCE OF COLLISION**

## Rules of the River

Members must:

- understand and follow the navigation rules of the river to reduce the risk of collision and minimise inconvenience to others navigating the river
- be aware of the danger of collision from all directions and be prepared to give way
- recognise and respect the rights and needs of other water users
- watch out for unexpected floating or partly submerged objects

## Safety and rescue procedures

Members must:

- be aware of safety and rescue procedures in the case of an incident. Coaches can provide instruction on how to deal with capsize and other hazardous situations
- come to the aid of any river user that they see in distress or difficulty, providing it does not compromise their own safety

## River conditions

River conditions may, at the same time, be dangerous to the inexperienced and improve the training for the more experienced.

The club recognises that some members will occasionally compete in hazardous conditions and that training in similar conditions is a necessary part of their training. All members must, however, assess the conditions before commencing any paddling session and the less experienced must be prepared to abandon their intention to paddle if the conditions are beyond those that they could reasonably cope with.

## 7. RED BOARDS

Adverse river and weather conditions can apply during the summer as well as winter months. The Environment Agency will display 'red boards' at its locks and online (<http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk/>) when the conditions merit it. The lack of red boards does not mean that canoeists will not encounter hazardous conditions when they use the river.

Whatever the stream conditions are, adults using their own craft are responsible for making their own decisions regarding safety. The club is not responsible for the actions or safety of adult members who decide to launch from the club's premises or who happen to be club members.

### Notes regarding all instruction and coaching

It is the coach's responsibility to assess the conditions and the competency of their group to cope with them. Before the start of a session the coach must make the paddlers aware of the Red Boards situation, thus giving individuals the opportunity to opt out of a water session.

The instruction of less experienced adults is subject to the same procedure as that for Juniors (see below).

Any coach who takes a group out on the water during a Red Boards situation must carry out a risk assessment and record it in the paddling log before venturing out on the water. All those making the decision must sign the log. This is located on the island on top of the cabinet in the entrance lobby. A separate entry is needed for each individual training session. Coaches are advised to fill in the log even if the decision not to go out on the water is made to show that the process of assessment is being followed.

FAILURE TO DO SO IS A BREACH OF THE CLUB'S SAFETY POLICY AND MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION BEING TAKEN.

### **Special notes regarding Junior Instruction and coaching**

Juniors aged under 14 are not allowed onto the water during a Red Board period, unless that Under 14 is of a division 6+ standard, with permission of a Level 2 or higher coach, and remains in sight of that coach for the entire session.

Juniors aged 14 and over are not allowed onto the water during a Red Boards period unless the following conditions apply:

- a) They must be of a division 6 or higher standard
- b) They must be supervised by a qualified instructor or coach who carries necessary safety equipment, including throw line. Coaching from a motor launch is advised for these sessions.
- c) Instruction or coaching may only take place if the coach or instructor has conferred with and has the agreement of a Level 2 or higher coach that the risks have been assessed and are acceptable. The design of the session, including safety precautions to be taken, must have been discussed during this process.
- d) The agreement to proceed does not remove the responsibility for safety from the coach or instructor who wishes to run a session under Red Boards conditions
- e) Under 16s must wear buoyancy aids. Under 18s are strongly advised to do so.

### **Other situations**

**Darkness:** Paddling in club craft under Red Boards conditions at night, ie in the hours of darkness, is not permitted.

**Competitions:** In previous years, high stream conditions have resulted in events being abandoned on the advice of the Environment Agency. There is now a move towards a risk-assessment approach. Careful selection of course following inspection of conditions, restricting events to only the most capable competitors, etc, are all steps that can enable an event to take place. This is a matter for case-by-case discussion within a paddling committee.

## **8. LIGHTING**

When canoeing after sunset, two continuous white lights must be used, one showing forward and one aft.

Power-driven boats used for coaching must display an all-round white light and port and starboard navigation lights.

## **9. USE OF POWER-DRIVEN BOATS**

Club power-driven boats may only be used by members with a RYA PowerBoat Level 2 qualification or equivalent qualification which the RCC committee have passed as suitable. All qualifications to be lodged with the Secretary before the launch can be taken out. These craft are not available for general use.

## **10. COACHING /INSTRUCTING**

A coach or instructor provides instruction or guidance and takes a degree of responsibility for the safety of those in his/her group at all times while they are in his/her charge. The nature of

the responsibility changes from one of an overall nature when teaching juniors or beginners to an advisory nature when coaching experienced seniors.

An instructor must ensure that:

- the rules of navigation are followed
- club equipment is in a safe condition before use
- beginners receive adequate instruction before venturing on to the water
- beginners are not allowed to canoe unsupervised
- pupils follow instructions and are escorted from the session if they do not do so

An instructor should ensure that every 'pupil' in his/her charge is:

- aware of the appropriate safety procedures
- dressed suitable for the weather conditions they are likely to meet
- able to swim at least 25 metres in canoeing clothing

## **11. DISEASE/ILLNESS HAZARDS**

### **Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis)**

The risk of contracting Leptospirosis from recreational water is small, however the illness can be fatal so paddlers must be aware of it and take simple precautions to reduce the risk of infection. Weil's Disease is carried in the urine of rats and is not confined to the river Thames but is likely to be present in any fresh water where people canoe so precautions must be taken wherever paddling:

- Cover all cuts, abrasions and blisters with waterproof dressings
- Replace dressings after immersion in river water
- Shower after contact with river water
- Wash hands thoroughly after canoeing and before eating or drinking.

If you contract flu-like symptoms within 1-3 weeks of contact with water, consult your doctor and advise them of the circumstances of exposure. Ask for a Weil's Disease test if necessary.

### **Blue-Green Algae (Cyanobacteria)**

Cyanobacteria are commonly found in fresh and brackish water during mid to late summer. In favourable conditions, blooms may form. Algal scums accumulate downwind on the surface of lakes and slow moving water. Toxins produced by large blooms have proved fatal to sheep and dogs and can cause severe irritation and serious disorders in humans.

- Avoid immersion in or contact with water affected by algal scum
- Hose down all equipment after any exposure
- Wash all canoeing clothing thoroughly after returning home
- Always shower after contact with affected water

### **Gastro-intestinal illness**

There are currently no micro-biological standards for recreational water. The use of inland water will never be risk free and it is essential that users are aware of the risks involved in using a particular stretch of water. By way of precaution:

- do not eat or drink before showering/washing
- do not drink river water at any time
- if 'foul' water has been swallowed, refer to your doctor with full details

## Royal Canoe Club Code of Conduct

1. All members must abide by the club safety policy
2. All boats must display a valid Thames License or British Canoeing Licence
3. Do not remove equipment from club boats
4. Do not leave wet kit in the changing rooms
5. Always change out of wet kit before using club rooms
6. Leave the clubhouse tidy and ensure doors are locked and lights switched off.
7. Subscriptions, rack fees and race fees are to be paid promptly.
8. Junior Members may only be present on Club premises when accompanied by an adult or the nominated coach for their session.

### Further information

Detailed River flow rate (at Canbury Gardens) information can be found at:

<http://www.gaugemap.co.uk/#!Detail/1249/1382>

Weather forecast information can be found at:

[www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

British Canoeing's Safety Resources:

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/getting-started-1/safety-and-good-practice>

Event Management Safety:

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/guidance-resources/event-safety-management>