

CASE STUDY

Competitions and Events - Craft Floatation September 2023

Introduction

Many incidents reported through British Canoeing's Incident Reporting Online Form contain significant events and key learnings. From time to time and with permission of those involved we will create a case study from an incident. Case studies enable us to share others' experience with the wider paddlesport community to help raise awareness of paddling safely.

The Incident

Throughout the 2023 season several competitions and events were subject to windy and challenging weather conditions. Over the National Sprint Regatta weekend there were windy conditions and a strong headwind on the course. During the junior 500 metre race two juniors in a K2 capsized soon after the start of the race and required rescue. The two juniors, who were wearing buoyancy aids, were holding onto the boat to try to stop it from sinking. As the umpire boat approached the K2 was already submerged and the two junior paddlers were instructed to let go as it was dragging them down. In line with rescue protocol, the umpire prioritised rescuing the paddlers and getting them onto the motor boat, however, by the time the two juniors were recovered, the boat had been lost to the bottom of the lake. On further review it was found that the airbags, which supply the boat's buoyancy, had been removed for transportation or use by another crew and had not been refitted back into the boat before the boat was used on the lake.

Key Learnings

Both the organising committee and the club had followed the relevant procedures and completed risk assessments, however, many modern craft do not have fixed buoyancy and instead rely on airbags being fitted and inflated. This incident highlights the importance of having appropriate buoyancy fitted and inflated in all types of craft and disciplines. It also provides a reminder that, in general, competition rules place responsibility on the club and competitor to ensure that the craft is suitable and safe to use for the competition.

Good Practice

Sharing good practice is a key part of learning from incidents. This incident brings to life the following:

- Clubs and paddlers must ensure that their craft has sufficient buoyancy to meet the rules of the competition.
- Anyone involved in organising or taking part in a competition should be familiar and up to date with the rules as these are in place to ensure safety.
- Clubs, discipline committees, and event organisers should ensure that the relevant policies and procedures are in place.

Statement from the Sprint Committee

As part of the terms and condition of entry to a National Regatta, all boats must have adequate and visible buoyancy to keep the boat afloat when filled with water and to support the weight of the paddler(s). Competitors will be disqualified from a race or incur penalty points if they are found to have competed in a boat with insufficient buoyancy. At the finish of a race, boats can be selected at random to be checked by Boat Control at all National Sprint Racing Regattas.

Conclusion

Learning from incidents and near misses is important for the future safety of the sport. British Canoeing would like to thank the Sprint Racing Committee for their role in ensuring that their experience is shared across the sport.

Please use [British Canoeing's Incident Reporting Online Form](#) to report an incident.

For any questions or support please email: safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk