

CASE STUDY

Coasteering Fatality - Dorset Concerns and Recommendations from the Coroner's Report - 13th October 2023

November

The Incident:

A coasteering group led by a single experienced coasteering guide, suffered an incident which resulted in a fatality during the activity. At the time all participants were in the water.

The coroner's report and this case study contain important lessons to be learned by every outdoor instructor, coach, leader and deployer into the death of a client in Dorset in 2019.

Coroner's Concerns:

During the inquest concerns were raised on the safety management of lead sessions.

These included:

1. Problems created by a single guide/instructor working alone.
Can an emergency be managed if:
 - The guide/instructor is incapacitated
 - Or as was the case in this incident the guide/instructor must attend to an emergency with one client.
2. Access to a means for summoning emergency assistance if needed.
3. Client awareness of the true nature of the activity and its physical demands and provider awareness of clients' physical health and swimming ability.

The coroner's report sets out concerns and identifies lessons that can be learnt for instructors, coaches, leaders and deployers when delivering paddlesport sessions.

[View the full coroner's report](#)

Lone working

Paddlesport coaches and leaders working in isolation is common practice in both sheltered water environments to advanced conditions. This could include delivering sessions to small groups as well as specific one to one development episodes.

Lone working is recommended to feature in activity risk assessments, with appropriate mitigations and systems in place. You are advised to focus on the increased risks of lone working. You should identify how emergencies will be managed for both the clients/paddlers being led as well for the coach/leader if they encounter difficulty.

If an assistant is being used/deployed as part of the safety framework, they should have suitable competences/training and they fully understand their role.

Full consideration of the group or paddler being coached/led is important, and whether they have the capabilities to respond, provide support to an incident.

Within the risk assessment, consider what mechanisms are in place to summon the emergency services whilst also caring for the group/casualty

Summoning Emergency Assistance:

An important responsibility of all paddlesport coaches and leaders is the choice of equipment carried to summon emergency assistance. This will be determined by the environment, and it is recommended that any device carried is working efficiently, fully charged and capable of maintaining signal throughout the activity.

Paddlesport coaches and leaders should take into account that in the winter months batteries are affected by the cold, as well as taking photos and videos throughout the day with the phone that is also a communication device can drain the battery.

Ensure everyone on the session understands where safety equipment and communication devices are carried as well as how to summon help if required.

If a call to the emergency services is delayed which extends the period of waiting, you must consider what the appropriate actions are to keep the group safe. You should take into consideration the group's ability, the nature of the incident as well as the environment. This should be part of your planning and risk assessment.

Clients' ability and understanding of the demands from the activity

At the initial stages of enquiry or introduction to a paddlesport session it is strongly recommended that everyone taking part in the activity is made aware of what the planned session involves and the physical demands they will be subject to.

As part of any booking process or when joining an organisation, it is recommended that a system is in place to collect all relevant information including an individual's health and fitness issues.

Any individual's health and fitness issues should be shared with those leading the session/activity, which will support the decision-making process for appropriate planning, consideration of content, and the environment.

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