

PADDLESAFER

Introduction

Paddlesafer is designed to provide safety information, guidance and advice for everyone involved in paddlesport including clubs, officials, volunteers, providers, event organisers and coaches.

The range of activities covered by paddlesport is huge. Not only are there hundreds of different craft but the type of water and environment in which the sport is undertaken varies greatly. In an “assumed risk sport” identifying hazards, assessing risk and putting in place controls to promote safety is central to both planning and practice. This information will help you to understand recommended standards, identify risk and run activities that support the safety of paddlers and members of the public.

Although the guidance is extensive any queries or any request for support can be directed to: safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk.

Updates

This document will be reviewed and updated and republished annually. In addition to this, updates may be made during the year to reflect new or improved practice, or changes in standards.

Previous Versions

- PaddleSafer V2 - 31st March 2019 - Annual Updates
- PaddleSafer V2.1 - 4th June 2019 - General Corrections
- PaddleSafer V3 - 21st Feb 2020 - Annual Updates
- PaddleSafer V4- 19th April 2021 - Annual Updates
- PaddleSafer V5 - 18th May 2022 - Annual Updates
- PaddleSafer V6 - 17th July 2023 - Annual Updates
- PaddleSafer V6a - 12th October 2023 - New Information Sheet on Shoulder Dislocation and Injury
- PaddleSafer V7 - 18th January 2024 - General Updates

Updates to V7 for 2024 are:

- 6.2 – Ocean Racing - The addition of four documents which provide specific guidance for Ocean Racing which aims to support paddlers, coaches and event organisers for ocean racing

Note

Paddlesafer provides general guidance to all those involved in paddlesport activity on safe practice in paddlesport. It is the responsibility of everyone to identify, define and monitor their own safety practices, guidance and procedures specific to the environment and activities. Whilst every effort is made to ensure that the medical and other similar information and guidance in this manual is accurate and reflective of best practice at the time of publication, it is the users responsibility to ensure that such information and guidance is up to date before acting upon it. British Canoeing accepts no responsibility for the content of third party websites accessed through links in this publication.

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Section 1 - Culture and Practice

1.1 Safety Culture and Duty of Care

Everyone involved in paddlesport, as a National Governing Body, coach or leader, paddler, club official, centre manager /provider or event organiser, is expected to ensure their actions or lack of action do not compromise the safety of themselves or others. Safety should be a culture which runs through all our activities and is a normal part of everyday thinking and practice. It should be embedded in the way your club, organisation, officials and volunteers work. This culture should include:

- Taking responsibility for your own safety both on and off the water
- Ensuring that your actions both on and off the water do not put others at risk
- Using your 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 recommended which considers the environment, individual abilities and the activity being undertaken. The recording of decisions is encouraged and seen as good practice. Likewise the reporting of incidents to British Canoeing is a way of sharing experience that can be used to inform future practice, identify issues within the sport and help keep others safe. To report an incident please visit the British Canoeing website [Incident Reporting Online Form](#).

1.2 Instructor / Coaching / Leadership and Safety Training

One of the foundations of safety within the diverse range of paddlesport is training. British Canoeing takes great pride in its suite of qualifications and awards, using up to date research and development which makes it one of the most widely respected and recognised paddlesport organisations around the world. One way to acquire the skills for assessing risk,

coaching, rescue, leadership is to attend a course run by an approved British Canoeing [Provider](#).

1.2.1 Environmental Definitions and Deployer Guidance

[Guidance](#) is available on suggested ratios using British Canoeing Qualifications and Awards as well as definitions of environments.

1.2.2 Instructing and Coaching

There are various instructor and coaching courses available, depending on the type of craft and environment operated in. Details of the optional pathways, courses and qualifications can be found on the [British Canoeing Awarding Body](#) website.

1.2.3 Leadership and Guiding

British Canoeing offers leadership and guide courses in sheltered, moderate and advanced water environments, in various craft. Details can be found on the [British Canoeing Awarding Body](#) website.

1.2.4 Safety and Personal Development Courses

Safety and personal development [training courses](#) are available for inland waters, surf, sea and white water as well as options in various craft.

1.3 Water Confidence

When starting in paddlesport the ability to swim is desirable but not essential. In a coached or supervised session, non-swimming participants should be confident in the water, not panic and be able to follow instructions in the event of a capsize. The ability to swim is important when paddling in non sheltered water.

1.4 Roles and Responsibilities

Paddling Community

Everyone involved in paddling is expected to:

- Take responsibility for their own safety on and off the water
- Ensure their actions on and off the water do not put others at risk
- Be aware of and abide by club /organisations policies, if applicable, and event safety procedures / rules
- Report all incidents, if applicable, to British Canoeing

Clubs

Club officers are expected to ensure a positive safety culture and safe practice within the club. They are expected to:

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

Events

Event officials and organising committee:

- Complete and maintain an Event Risk Assessment and use this to guide their events safety plans
- Communicate and encourage safe practice across their event activities
- Report all accidents and incidents via the British Canoeing [incident reporting system](#)
- Appoint a paddlesport safety officer to lead on safe practice.

Discipline and Regional Development Committees

Committees are expected to:

- Develop and encourage a positive safety culture and safe practice across the region or discipline
- Support clubs and events in organising their activities and encourage them to follow good practice on the risk associated with the type of club, water and activities
- Promote safety education and training
- Review the safety provision of events within their discipline or region and provide or withhold approval for each to be held

- Maintain contact with navigation and other authorities to assist their clubs and events
- Report all accidents and incidents via the British Canoeing [incident reporting system](#)
- Appoint a paddlesport safety officer to lead and advise on promoting safe practice

British Canoeing and National Associations

- Provides leadership and promote a positive safety culture
- Provides support through safety education and training for regions, disciplines, clubs, events, coaches, leaders and paddlers
- Supports the Safety Advisory Panel and Safety Officer
- Provides a national incident reporting system, with regular analysis of trends
- Provides guidance to paddlers, clubs and events
- Provide safety alerts and communications
- Maintain contact and work in partnership with National Marine Authorities and stakeholders to assist in the safe practice of paddlesport
- Provide coaching and leading training that includes safety and rescue

Section 2 - Equipment

2.1 Paddlesport Craft (boats, skis, and boards)

There are hundreds of craft in all shapes and sizes, each designed for different activities and types of water. It is important to choose the right craft for the type of water and conditions. The craft should be suitable to perform safely for the duration of the activity/conditions and be matched to the skill level of the participant. Before setting out on the water paddlers should ensure that their craft (and, if coaching/ leading, the craft in their group):

- Is the right one for the conditions, type of water and ability levels
- Will not sink when swamped and will be useable as buoyancy for its crew
- Has secured buoyancy (floatation) at each end that will not wash out or become detached from the craft in the event of a capsize
- Is capable of being towed by rope and grasped by hand with grablines or anchor points
- Allows for easy exit in the event of a capsize
- Is not designed, made or finished in a way that could cause injury or impede exit
- Possesses the strength to withstand all foreseeable forces
- Has end loops, grab handles or toggles in a good serviceable condition where they are manufactured and fitted as part of the craft.
- If fitted with a footrest, has one which will not allow feet to become entrapped and will not break in the event of foreseeable paddling forces or impacts

- Is of a colour that is clearly visible to other water users or rescue authorities as appropriate
- Has any accessories or attachments such as rudders, skegs, pumps/self bailers or retractable fins in good working order and properly fitted

2.1.1 Annual Checking

Clubs and outdoor activity providers are expected to make, as a minimum, an annual check of the condition of each craft owned by the organisation, record that such a check has taken place and what action if any is required if defects are found. The checking and keeping of records is a legal requirement for equipment considered personal protection equipment (PPE). The eLearning package, [Equipment Management and Safety](#), takes you through how to check equipment, what is expected of you and what records to keep.

2.1.2 Customisation of Boats

Paddlers routinely [customise their craft](#) to give greater connectivity, to improve performance or for comfort.

Designs have evolved over the years to have safety manufactured in. Any significant modification may increase the risks including the risk of entrapment. Common ways to customise a boat are by fitting:

- Padding to the sides of a kayak seat to give a snugger fit
- Thigh braces, some may reduce the size of the cockpit

For more extreme performance environments:

- Central foam blocks
- Straps or additional straps to secure the paddler in the boat

British Canoeing strongly advises against the customisation of boats where a modification can lead to difficulty in exiting the boat or entrapment on the failure to roll. In high level performance environments the marginal gains that such modifications produce do not justify the personal safety risks involved.

An incident in 2018 at a surfing competition, involving a customised boat resulted in a near drowning. As a result the British Canoeing Surf Technical Committee issued [guidance on lap strap outfitting systems](#) which is relevant across the disciplines to all those, considering customisation and paddling in high performance environments.

2.2 Buoyancy Aids (sometimes referred to as Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs))

Buoyancy aids are designed to give the wearer both floatation and ease of movement. There are many different types of buoyancy aid designed to be discipline or activity specific. It is important to choose the most appropriate design for safety as well as for comfort and performance. When purchasing and fitting a buoyancy aid you should ensure the following:

- Construction complies with CE Standard EN 393 (International Standard - [ISO 12402](#))
- It is bright in colour, the correct size, adjustable and fits properly with the waist belt/draw cord secured around your waist to prevent it lifting when in the water and has a whistle attached
- It has leg loops if it is for young children. These will secure the buoyancy aid better than a waist belt
- If the buoyancy aid is chosen because it contains pockets or other components that are needed to carry a mobile phone, equipment, knife, food etc. these must not impede paddling, normal rescue practices or exit from craft
- Advanced white water buoyancy aids with integral harnesses must be properly fitted and you should know how to use them in a rescue situation
- Store your buoyancy aid properly, do not crush it, keep it clean, rinse with fresh water and keep it dry but not in direct sunlight. Always follow the manufacturer's advice on caring for your buoyancy aid

It is recognised that in some circumstances paddlers may not wear a buoyancy aid. This may be in a competition environment where the rules of competition do not require buoyancy aids to be worn. There may also be circumstances where paddlers chose not to wear a buoyancy aid for personal reasons. In these circumstances it is strongly advised that a dynamic risk assessment is made, that considers the environmental factors and takes appropriate precautions. Being prepared and thinking ahead can eliminate many risks.

The paddler should have:

- Reliable self rescue skills
- The ability to swim

In addition, have:

- Checked their boat and equipment thoroughly before setting out
- Be able to use the craft for floatation in the event of capsize and considered measures to avoid being separated from their craft

Testing Buoyancy Aids

Buoyancy aids should be checked regularly and the manufacturer's recommendations followed. Clubs and outdoor activity providers must undertake a formal visual inspection of their buoyancy aids to ensure their continued integrity. The shell, webbing/draw cord and fastenings must all be undamaged and in working order. An annual check must be recorded, identifying the date of purchase, the condition of each buoyancy aid and any action required.

Lifejackets

Lifejackets are used by certain individuals and disciplines within paddlesport; the majority of disciplines elect to use buoyancy aids as their main flotation device as they allow for better movement during paddling. Unlike buoyancy aids, auto inflation life jackets are designed to hold an unconscious person face up in the water. The typical leisure life jacket is rated as 150N ([ISO 12402-3](#)).

Waist Belt Personal Flotation Device (PFD)

Some SUP paddlers are using 100N-150N waist belt PFDs. These do not provide instant buoyancy but need to be deployed once the wearer hits the water. Paddlers should familiarise themselves with how the PFD is deployed and practise this regularly in a controlled environment.

Paddlers using lifejackets as a safety aid are expected to:

- Select a lifejacket that meets the needs and demands of their paddling
- Check the condition of the lifejacket
- Know how to correctly fit and deploy the lifejacket as per the manufacturer's instructions
- Service and replace the life jacket as per the manufacturer's guidelines

Life jackets are recommended:

- a. For non-swimmers
- b. For young children under supervision (there are some specifically designed for this including leg loops)
- c. For paddlers with pre existing medical condition which could potentially cause unconsciousness or disorientation.

2.3 Helmets

Helmets are not a necessity for every paddlesport activity, and considerations should be taken around appropriate head protection gear for each activity. Where participants wear religious headscarves, have a hairstyle or texture (e.g. Afro or dreadlock hair) which makes

wearing a helmet impractical, or other examples where wearing helmets may be more complex, possible solutions or alternatives should be considered. At no point should the wearing of a helmet be a barrier to inclusion.

Helmets should be worn in the following scenarios:

- Paddling water grade 2 (in closed cockpit boats and subject to local risk assessment) and for all paddling activity above grade 2
- Surfing
- Paddling among rocks or in sea caves
- During rescue practice
- Playing games including canoe polo where accidental contact may be made

Helmets must conform to [CE EN 1385](#) standard, be the right size, properly adjusted to be comfortable and give you good vision. Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

2.4 Spray Decks

On open water, sea, lakes and estuaries, spray decks are an essential part of a group's safety equipment. Group leaders and coaches should have decks of a construction which is robust enough to perform deep water rescues without damaging or compromising the integrity of the spray deck.

Spray decks should be checked before setting out. This includes the condition of pull straps/loops, elastic around the cockpit and body tube and pull cords.

It is important to ensure that the paddler knows how to release the spray deck and how to exit the boat safely.

2.5 Paddles

Across paddlesport the choice of paddle is specific to you and the type of paddling you do. Within each discipline there is a huge range of paddles to choose from which become highly specialised at high performance levels.

Getting the right paddle is important, not only for comfort and ease of propulsion but the wrong paddle can put strain on your body and lead to repetitive strain injury. The physical strains most commonly caused are wrist and hand problems, joint inflammation of elbows and shoulder strain.

Advice and guidance on choosing the right paddle can be gained from coaches, clubs, outdoor centres, experienced paddlers and professional paddlesport retailers. In choosing a paddle, firstly you need to consider the type of craft and paddling you wish to do and then match it to your own personal requirements. The considerations include:

- Paddle length – for any given paddlesport discipline, generally the taller you are, the longer paddle you need.
- Size and shape of blade
- Shaft – shape, flexibility, material made from and diameter. You may also consider split paddles where the length and feather can be adjusted to suit your requirements.
- Feather (the angle kayak blades are set). Can vary between 0 and 90 degrees.

Spare paddles

If you are undertaking a journey or paddling on “open water” (lake or sea), an important part of your safety equipment is a set of spare paddles. Spare kayak paddles are normally split shaft paddles that are stored so that they can be accessed quickly and easily if a breakage occurs.

2.6 Clothing

The clothing you wear for paddling is one of the most important decisions you make if you are to enjoy the sport safely. Identifying and using the correct clothing for the conditions, for you and your group, is an essential part of assessing and addressing risk. On the GoPaddling site is a guide to the [suggested clothing](#) you might need.

When paddling in conditions where the air temperature and/or the water temperature is cold, you should take additional precautions. Consider wearing specialist protective clothing suitable for immersion in cold water or carry spare clothing with you. Additional information can be found in section 4.4 of this document.

British Canoeing has produced a [video](#) with Olympic Gold medallist Joe Clarke on how you need to prepare for winter and cold conditions paddling. It contains some good tips that will help you prepare your own trip or session.

2.7 Safety Equipment - General

The safety of you and the people you paddle with depends on the equipment you carry and your ability to use it correctly. British Canoeing [safety and rescue courses](#) provide training in how to use safety equipment. There are a range of courses from foundation level to

advanced. It is recommended that all paddlers, especially those who may be in a leadership role attend a training course relevant to their needs.

All safety and rescue equipment should be carried in such a way that it is quickly and easily accessible. In carrying this equipment, it is strongly advised that you should adopt the [“clean” system](#) where ropes, tapes, cowtails or any other attached items are stored carefully to prevent snagging when paddling, on the bank or in the water.

An [information sheet](#) on the safe use of buoyancy aid (PFD) connected equipment has been produced in response to a series of incidents. Those paddling on white water are strongly advised to follow this guidance.

It is strongly advised to carry safety equipment such as clothing, first aid and communication devices in water proof containers. The choice of container including plastic barrels, dry bag or mobile phone case is critical for the type of paddlesport you are doing and the consequent situations you may face.

The more advanced you become as a paddler, coach or leader, the more advanced and specialised is the equipment you have available to you. You should consider carrying some or all of the following depending on the type of paddling you are doing:

- An appropriate towing system easily accessible, so that it can be deployed quickly when needed, quick release and set up so as to not restrict the manoeuvrability of the towing boat. These should be carried by the leader as a minimum and consideration given to others in the group who may be competent to undertake this role
- For white water activities it is strongly advised that a rescue/locking knife be carried by coaches and leaders and be easily accessible. Recent changes in legislation have made the carrying of knives in public a criminal offence. British Canoeing has published a [safety alert](#) on how this legislation affects paddlers On moving water you are strongly advised that a throw line is carried by the leader as a minimum. Anyone using a throw line should be trained in its use. Further throw lines may be carried by the group, at the discretion of leader
- Spare paddles
- For white water activities it is strongly advised that a rescue/locking knife be carried by coaches and leaders and be easily accessible. A folding saw may also form part of your equipment which can be useful in rescue situations for cutting branches or cutting people out of their boats in an entrapment situation. A proper storage system is essential for personal safety and to maintain the integrity of your own equipment
- Carry a basic repair kit that is appropriate for the boats that are being used.

2.8 Communication Devices / mobile phone

Good planning, preparation and organisation, before setting out on the water, are essential for your safety and/or that of your group. Your communication device is there as a backup to summon help in unforeseen circumstances. A means of communication is essential if you need to request support or rescue from a third party.

The leader of the group will need to determine what equipment should be carried by each individual in the group and collectively by the group. Equipment chosen must be appropriate for the activity and area of operation.

If you do need to call for help ensure that you request the correct rescue service e.g. coastguard, ambulance, fire service, mountain rescue etc. if the incorrect service is requested, this can lead to significant delays.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are the most frequently used form of communication in an emergency. The RNLI receive 90% of emergency calls involving canoes/kayaks etc from a mobile phone. In order for the mobile phone to be of use in an emergency you must ensure that it is easily and immediately to hand and is secured in a waterproof mobile phone case.

However, obtaining a signal in all areas in and around the UK cannot be guaranteed. It is strongly recommended that you or your group take alternative communication and/or signalling devices with you. This [case study](#) illustrates good practice using multiple communication and signalling devices.

Personal Locator Beacons (PLB's)

Personal Locator Beacons are just one method of calling for help when paddling at sea. They have proven their success in effecting quick and efficient rescue's even in remote locations. PLB's identify your position through Global Positioning System (GPS) and transmit a distress signal to the emergency services. British Canoeing has published an [information sheet](#) to provide further detail on PLBs.

All PLB's [must be registered with the coastguard](#). By registering you will ensure a response and enable the coastguard to identify the type of craft/vessel, the likely nature of the incident, provide information to the search and rescue assets and to tailor their response. They will also have your personal and emergency contact information. [It is simple to register your PLB online](#).

Other forms communication and signalling

The RNLI have produced comprehensive information on products that can be used for communication and to [call for help](#).

Your communication equipment may also include:

- Marine VHF radio (very high frequency) (operators should hold the VHF certificate for proficiency)
- Whistle
- Flares
- Satellite phone
- Torch
- You could also consider carrying a signalling mirror, strobe light or a chemical light stick (or electronic equivalent)

What3words – location finder

[What3words](#) is an easy to use way of finding and communicating your location, wherever you are. Using a mobile phone app What3words has divided the globe into 3x3 metre squares. Each square is given a unique 3 word address through using a total of 40,000 word combinations. The [app](#) is available from the main app stores.

It should be used alongside other communications devices/systems to help give your location and to call for help if there is an incident.

Advantages:

- It can be used anywhere in the world and can give accurate location information in remote places or where postcodes don't work
- It can avoid problems in misreading grid references and consequential miscommunication

Limitations

- Unlike OS Locate, there needs to be a mobile phone signal where you are

- If you are off shore and in difficulty e.g. have capsized, operating the phone in the water may be difficult. In tidal stream you will drift and your location constantly change
- The three words are ineffective if used in an incorrect order

Other devices to identify your location and call for help such as a PLB may be more effective.

OS Locate App

Used alongside your Ordnance Survey map, [OS Locate](#) is a fast and highly accurate means of pinpointing your exact location on the map, anywhere in Great Britain. If you have lost your bearings or simply would like a little reassurance, OS Locate is the ideal companion for all enthusiasts of the great outdoors. The app converts GPS location readings from your mobile phone to Ordnance Survey National Grid references or Lat/Long, enabling you to determine precisely where you are on an Ordnance Survey map. No mobile signal? No problem; OS Locate does not require a mobile signal to function – the inbuilt GPS system can be relied upon, even in the most remote areas. The [app](#) is available from the main app stores.

SafeTrx – The Coastguards Official Safety Identification system

The [RYA SafeTrx app](#) monitors your boat journeys and can alert emergency contacts should you fail to arrive on time. It links your location directly to the Coastguard enabling a quick response and swift rescue should you need it. It is an app for both Android and Apple iOS smartphones that allows you to track your journey on your phone. British Canoeing have published an [information sheet](#) which provides more detail on how the app works.

Contacting 999 for deaf paddlers

A [toolbox](#) of the various options available for Deaf people to contact 999 in an emergency, has been put together by Oliver Richardson from The Limping Chicken.

2.9 Transporting Boats

The transport of canoes and kayaks is generally by car. Careful selection of a roof rack from a reputable manufacturer is strongly recommended. The maximum load bearing as specified by the manufacturer must not be exceeded. A minimum load bearing weight of 75 kg is recommended. It must be fitted securely and routinely checked for movements and tension. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

The security of the roof load can be greatly enhanced by the selection of the relevant roof rack accessory or carrier for your boat. These include uprights, "J" bars, "V" bars, horizontal carriers and side loading sliding racks which ease the loading of heavy or unwieldy boats.

Boat overhangs

Overhangs from vehicles and rear overhangs for trailers are subject to regulation. Failure to follow these regulations may lead to prosecution and points on your licence. For most canoes and kayaks the regulations you need to be aware of are:

Rear Overhang:

- Up to 1 metre - recommend that the load is clearly marked
- From 1 metre to 2 metres - overhang must be clearly marked

Front overhang:

- Up to 2 metres - no requirements to mark

Side overhang:

- Up to 30.5 cm on each side - no requirements to mark

For loads that exceed these limits there are more stringent regulations. These can be found in the guidance from the [Department of Transport](#).

Trailers

Since 1997 there has been increased regulation on who can drive a vehicle whilst towing a trailer. For certain categories a driving test was introduced. The regulations were amended again in 2013. The DVLA has produced [guidance](#) on towing trailers in Great Britain.

Trailer Towing Licence Requirements

The government has announced [new rules for towing a trailer or caravan with a car from autumn 2021](#). If you passed your car driving test after 1 January 1997, you will be allowed to tow trailers up to 3,500kg maximum authorised mass (MAM). If you passed your car driving test before 1 January 1997 you will not be affected by the changes.

2.10 Powered boats / launches

Powered boats and launches used in coaching and support are expected, as a minimum, to be driven by drivers who have achieved an RYA Power Boat level 2 licence. British Canoeing has published [Powerboats and Qualifications guidance](#).

2.11 Minibus Driver Licensing Requirements

Government guidance on driver licensing requirements has been in force for a number of years. In 2018 The Government issued [further guidance](#) clarifying how the legislation should be interpreted.

2.12 Manual Handling for Paddlesport

It is essential to use appropriate technique when lifting, carrying, or moving craft, as well as performing rescues to reduce the risk of injury. British Canoeing has created an eLearning package, [Manual Handling for Paddlesport](#), which explains appropriate manual handling techniques for paddlesport.

Section 3 - Safety Management

This section is designed to give clubs, coaches and providers the tools they need to assess risk and inform good practice, organisation and management of both the club/venue itself and the activities run.

3.1 Risk Assessment

In an assumed risk sport such as paddlesport the evaluation of risk is central to all activities. A [risk assessment](#) should help you to find effective solutions to reducing/controlling risk which maintain standards or improves safety.

It is useful to bear in mind that in an assumed risk/adventurous sport it is not usually possible or necessarily desirable to eliminate risk altogether. The aim is to reduce risk to an acceptable level. A risk assessment may result in no new risk control measures being introduced over and above those already in place.

Risk is the combination of how likely an incident is to occur with how serious the outcome could be. A risk assessment should demonstrate that you have done the following:

1. IDENTIFY – the hazards
2. CONSIDER – who might be harmed and how

3. EVALUATE – the risks and decide whether the existing risk control measures are adequate or whether more should be done
4. RECORD – your findings and implement them
5. REVIEW – your assessment and update if necessary. They can be updated periodically e.g. every year, after an incident or near miss or if new activities/changes have been introduced.

Risk assessment doesn't have to be complicated, time consuming and onerous. The assessment of risk is second nature for experienced coaches, leaders and officials.

Who should carry out a Risk Assessment?

All paddlers are advised to assess risk before setting out on the water and are advised to consider environmental factors, their skill level relative to the water and conditions, equipment needs, clothing and capability of those you are paddling with.

A risk assessment can be undertaken by a person who understands the activity and environment in which it is taking place and has the experience and/or training to identify the relevant risks for the individuals taking part. These include:

- Appointed Safety Officer
- Coaches
- Club Officials
- Experienced Leaders
- Event Organisers

British Canoeing provides [Event Safety Safety Management training](#) for event organisers / safety officers.

Risk assessments are valuable in themselves but are also used to inform the writing of club / event / venue rules, standard operating procedures, safety plans, event organisation and safety briefings.

3.1.1 Risk Management and Risk Assessment eLearning

British Canoeing [Risk Management and Risk Assessment eLearning](#) covers aspects of identifying and managing risk. This eLearning covers types of risk, roles and responsibilities, scenarios and completing written risk assessments. This eLearning provides 5 CPD points.

3.2 Types of Risk Assessment

There are three types of risk assessment that are detailed below. They are:

- Generic
- Activity/site specific
- Dynamic

They can be undertaken to suit different situations, activities and environments. You may need to undertake more than one depending on the purpose behind your risk assessment. You should consider the approach you need to take by assessing the risk.

3.2.1 Generic

Generic (general) risk assessment is important because it formalises our thinking and gives consistency to the way an organisation works or an event or activity might take place. Such risk assessments are useful in managing the unexpected and can help ensure consistency when the same trip or event is run regularly or by different people e.g. regular weekly club/provider activity and its delivery. They offer basic core practices, which can then be applied and adapted. The disadvantage of a generic risk assessment is that it is written for everyone, it can become static and forgotten in practice. It is expected that you will review your generic risk assessments annually to keep them current.

The type of risks which would be covered by a generic risk assessment would include:

- Drowning
- Hypothermia/clothing
- Slips and trips
- Injury from manual handling
- Other river/water users
- Overhanging trees
- Water quality/waterborne diseases
- Night paddling

This list is not exhaustive but is designed to give examples only. British Canoeing has also put together an [example of a generic risk assessment](#).

3.2.2 Activity / site specific

Any activities organised and run by a club, commercial provider or volunteer is expected to be risk assessed to ensure that those participating in the activities can do so safely, and in order that the club or provider can meet the duty of care they owe to the participants.

This may therefore require the club or provider to risk assess specific activities, specific sites used by or 'managed' by the club or provider, or specific river features or structures used for activities.

These could be for example a club trip, a rapid or site used for training or an event.

British Canoeing has put together a [quick guide](#) to stimulate thought as to what type of risks you might find in a specific location or activity.

3.2.3 Dynamic

This is the ongoing assessments we make throughout the day or session. This is referred to as the 'dynamic Management of Risk'. dynamic risk assessment is a continuous process of identifying hazards.

The dynamic assessment is the final link in a risk assessment process, it takes place within circumstances that are unforeseeable and / or are changing constantly (e.g. on a white water river or where conditions on the sea change). It is this final assessment which we rely upon to allow us to carry on our paddling activities safely, and to make carefully considered judgments. The dynamic approach is a continuous thought process.

The Health and Safety Executive consider that the competent person in charge is more important than a written risk assessment because it is they who are in the best position to assess the risks at that time. As such they are able to act 'dynamically', to assess the risk and immediately implement a 'controlling' action. Also, they have the ability to constantly review the risk assessment as the conditions alter.

A dynamic risk assessment should always be complementary to any established generic risk assessment. Paddlers, coaches, leaders and event organisers should have an understanding and awareness of the environment in which the activity is taking place. This understanding will provide them with the judgement and knowledge to make dynamic "on the move" decisions relating to both their own and others safety.

The Health and Safety Executive have published useful [guidance on risk assessments](#).

3.3 Quantifying Risk - Examples

Examples of how risk can be assessed and recorded on risk assessments, using different methods can be found below. Whichever system you use, it should demonstrate that you have identified the risk, considered it and taken what reasonable measures you can to control that risk.

3.3.1 Descriptive risk rating guide

This [type of risk assessment](#) carries no calculated risk rating, but demonstrates that the hazards have been identified, the risks quantified and steps taken to eliminate or reduce risks to an acceptable level.

N.B. If the risk assessment identifies a lot of improvements that can be made, don't try and do everything at once. Make a plan with sensible priorities that identifies who will do what and when.

3.4 Premises and Fire Risk Assessment

If you own or operate from premises you will need to undertake a risk assessment of your building and the site you operate from. The Health and Safety Executive have produced [guidance](#) and model paperwork on small community buildings which they have referenced as 'Village Halls'.

Legionnaires Disease - Safe water management

[Legionnaires' disease](#) can be contracted by inhaling small droplets of water (aerosols), suspended in the air, containing Legionella bacteria, for example, from changing room showers. Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia and everyone is susceptible to infection. Water systems in premises must be managed correctly to minimise this risk. If water system stagnation occurs due to lack of use, this increases the risks of Legionella multiplying. This [information sheet](#) explains the risks and the simple steps you should take to control this risk.

Fire risk

Your premises should have a fire risk assessment. You will need to consider:

- Emergency routes and exits
- Fire detection and warning systems
- Fire fighting equipment
- Removal or safe storage of dangerous substances
- The needs of vulnerable people, for example the elderly, young children or those with disabilities

- Providing information to employees and other people on the premises staff fire safety training
- An emergency fire evacuation plan (see below)

Guidance is available from both [Government](#) and the [HSE](#) on fire risk assessments.

Evacuation Plan

Premises must have a fire and evacuation plan. Included in this should be:

- Where the fire exits are
- Where members should meet once evacuated
- Where the fire extinguishers are located
- Who is responsible for the maintenance of the fire extinguishers
- A signing in sheet to record members inside the premises
- Who is responsible for the roll call, to ensure no one is missing? (Name/Position)
- Where the emergency contact details (for members) are kept

3.5 Standard Operating Procedures

These procedures govern how the club or providers operation is run, organised and managed. Clubs and providers are expected to have their standard operating procedures in place as part of their normal practice.

British Canoeing has created a [guide](#) to the content of clubs standard operating procedures.

The guide is not designed to be exhaustive but is to give an indication as to the type of organisational issues that should be included. All clubs and providers are different and need to consider their own operating environment.

3.6 Safety Policy - Safety Plan

3.6.1 Safety Policy

Clubs and providers should have a Health and Safety Policy, which is a clear statement of the club's commitment to safety. It should form part of the club's key documentation and be signed by the club chair or the organisation's CEO/owner. British Canoeing has created a Health and Safety Policy [template](#).

3.6.2 Safety Plan

A Safety Plan can be formed through a wider review of systems on how the club/organisation operates and manages safety. It can inform changes and improvements in how the club/organisation manages its affairs and runs activities.

British Canoeing has produced a [checklist](#) that can be used to audit your club/organisation and its activities.

This checklist is the recommended minimum standard to promote the safety of general/recreational activities. Its purpose is to ensure that all appropriate steps have been taken to ensure the safety of participants in paddling activities.

This checklist is a useful tool for appointed safety officers to assist them complete a generic audit of all activities. It will help provide the club committee/provider's organisation with the reassurance that standard safety measures for activities are being met.

This checklist is also a useful tool for trip/ journey leaders when organising either a series of trips or a new "one off" trip or journey. Please refer to it when planning for a safe activity, and complete as required to confirm that all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure the safety of all participants.

3.7 Recording Incidents

Any incidents, accidents, injuries or near misses must be recorded and that information held for a minimum of 5 years. There should be a system for recording this information by club officials, members, coaches and provider staff. Information should be submitted and retained in the form of an accident book held by the club/provider or on incident report forms.

It should be noted that in the case of adults, a compensation claim must be filed within 3 years from the date of the accident. If the person who is injured is below 18 years of age on the date that the accident occurs, the 3 year limitation only comes into force after the child's 18th birthday. This means, a child injury claim for an individual under 18 can be filed at any time before their 21st birthday. A claim is issued (formerly a writ) against another individual or club/provider (the defendant) who they consider to have been negligent in causing the injury. The defendant has only 21 days to acknowledge receipt of the claim and a further 90 days either to accept or deny liability and, in the case of a denial, to produce supporting documentation and evidence. If any claim is issued against an organisation affiliated to British Canoeing such as a club, Regional Development Team or Discipline, you should immediately contact British Canoeing's Insurance Company, (or your own insurance company if not affiliated to British Canoeing).

The club committee/ provider should review any incident; assess what can be learnt from it to improve safety or the management of the club, update risk assessments and record in the minutes what has been discussed and the action taken.

3.8 Reporting Incidents

3.8.1 British Canoeing

British Canoeing has an [online reporting system](#) for all paddling incidents, whether you are a member of British Canoeing or not. Incidents that should be reported include near misses, as this information will help us to identify paddling issues and to establish an accurate picture of safety and other concerns across the country.

It also includes incidents such as those with other water users, access issues, pollution/environment etc. as well as major incidents or accidents.

British Canoeing's online reporting system enables you to formally log the incident and request support from British Canoeing if the incident is not fully resolved. There is also a downloadable copy of the incident form that can be used on site at your club/venue .

3.8.2 Insurance

Accidents, injury and damage to property or equipment that may give rise to an insurance claim, should be reported to [British Canoeing's Insurers](#) for information, even when no claim has been made at the time.

If a claim is received by the club or coach you should notify the insurance company immediately. [Marsh | Bluefin Sport](#) are the appointed insurance broker to British Canoeing, Canoe Wales, the Scottish Canoe Association and the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland.

3.9 Emergency Response Plan

An emergency response plan identifies the actions to be taken if an incident does occur. It is designed to reduce the harm and efficiently deal with the incident.

“Stay safe: always plan ahead, have information, equipment and systems in place”

3.9.1 Major Incident Response Plan

This advice is designed to help event organisers, clubs, venues and coaches in dealing with a major emergency. It is designed to act as a “handrail” to help guide you through the steps you need to take.

Definition of a Major Incident

This is either a very serious single incident or combination of incidents which could lead to loss of life, a serious injury or where there is substantial damage. Examples are:

- Death or serious injury leading to hospitalisation. Included are participants, competitors, volunteers or spectators
- A life-threatening illness or medical condition to an individual or group
- Overdue groups / individuals or loss of contact, which gives rise to concern e.g. sudden change in conditions or unexpected behaviour
- Deliberate major act of violence or vandalism
- Serious damage to buildings, event infrastructure or equipment
- Any adverse situation in which the media are or may be involved

Response Checklist

In dealing with any major incident there are actions you need to consider; the attached check list takes you through the steps you may need to take. British Canoeing has put together a [major incident response checklist](#).

Events and venues may also consider displaying an [Emergency Response Card](#) which gives vital information to those on site about rendering assistance and calling for help.

3.9.2 Developing an Emergency Response Plan

The nature, location etc. of the venue will determine the extent of your emergency response plan e.g. you may be a pool based club which works with the swimming pool staff to address emergencies, with easy access for the emergency services or you could be running an event on your own premises in a remote location. You should formulate your own plan based on your own unique circumstances and risks. British Canoeing has created an [information sheet on developing an emergency response plan](#).

3.10 Safety Officer - Role Description

Responsibility for safety rests with the club. All club members have a duty of care to each other and for their own safety. Every club must have a named safety officer, this is required as part of affiliation to British Canoeing. The [safety officer's role](#) is to support safety systems and have an overview of safety within the club.

The safety officer should have sufficient experience to carry out this role but does not need to be trained if the club runs events (closed events) and activities for its members only. If the

club runs events that are considered “open events” that are publicly promoted to other paddlers and organisations then the safety officer must undertake [British Canoeing's Event Safety Management Training](#).

3.11 Night Paddling

Paddling at night is widely practised, it is important to take into account the increased risks. Additional considerations at night include:

- a. Navigation lights. These are essential if there are other boats (powered or unpowered) on the water. Waterways which are administered by a navigation authority will have rules relating to its use at night. You should make yourself aware of them and follow these rules. Lights can be attached to the boat or worn as body light as long as they remain visible. Where no local navigation rules are in place the [MCA Collision Regulations](#) should be followed.
- b. At night any navigation rules regarding location MUST always be followed. Not only for your own safety but if you are not “in the right place or not on the correct side” other craft may be confused by this and adjust their course accordingly, increasing the risk to all water users.
- c. In conditions where there is an increase in risk a more stable boat can be selected to minimise the risk of capsize.
- d. Paddling is strongly advised to take place in groups.
- e. Journeys must be well planned with get out points identified before setting off.

3.12 Lone Paddling

Paddling on your own is widely practised. Paddling on your own significantly increases the risks when compared to paddling in a group. The collective capability of the group acts to provide a safety net if things go wrong. If you have a pre-existing medical condition such as epilepsy, heart problems, diabetes, asthma etc. you are strongly advised to paddle as part of a group.

It is recommended that you paddle in a group but it is recognised that some paddlers will choose to go out alone. If you choose to paddle alone you should have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to do so.

Whenever you paddle alone you are advised to undertake a dynamic risk assessment, consider the environmental factors and take appropriate precautions. Being prepared and thinking ahead can eliminate many risks.

You should:

- Always carry a means of calling for help on you person
- Wear a buoyancy aid
- Have reliable self rescue skills
- Check your boat and equipment thoroughly before you set out
- Tell someone where you are going and when you will be back. Call them when you get back

On a journey you are advised to:

- Carry on your person, [communication / signalling equipment](#) (mobile phone, PLB, VHF radio)
- Carry a spare paddle and a repair kit
- Have knowledge or familiarity with the route
- Know the expected weather conditions (listened to and understood the effects of the most recent weather forecast)
- Carry navigation equipment if needed

3.13 Safeguarding

Protecting children and adults

[British Canoeing is committed](#) to ensuring that everyone can enjoy paddlesport in a safe environment where they are protected from any form of poor practice, abuse or neglect. Working with the NSPCC, Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), British Canoeing has developed policies, procedures, guidance and templates to support everyone involved in our sport.

Training and Vetting

While there is Government legislation setting out legal and duty of care procedures, we all have a moral duty of care to ensure everyone has the right to live free from abuse or neglect. British Canoeing aims to ensure that anyone who is in regular contact with children and young people through paid or voluntary roles within the sport have completed the [minimum requirements](#) for their role.

It is also the responsibility of an employer or deployer to ensure their staff or volunteers (paid or voluntary) have been [appropriately vetted](#) prior to being deployed in their role.

If you have a concern

We are committed to investigate all reported safeguarding concerns or allegations. If you know of a safeguarding concern or allegation, whether it has been disclosed to you by someone else, something you have witnessed or something that has been worrying you, don't keep it to yourself – always [report the concern](#). While safety and safeguarding are linked, it's important to understand the difference between the two and that each must be reported through the correct channels. This is to ensure the right team gets the information they need and can act quickly where required.

3.14 Event Safety

British Canoeing has developed a system of event safety management which applies to all events run by British Canoeing. This is to ensure the sport continues to operate at the highest safety levels.

To support this system a programme of [training for event safety officers](#) is in place.

British Canoeing also has a system of [event promotion](#) which is open to all organisations running paddlesport events. This is a way to promote your event through British Canoeing's extensive network. All events need to demonstrate adequate risk assessment/safety plans and insurance cover.

Section 4 - Health and Medical Conditions

4.1 First Aid

4.1.1 eLearning Activity - First Aid

An [Introduction to First Aid eLearning activity](#) has been created by British Canoeing. It is not a first aid qualification but serves as an introduction to first aid and covers 5 topics:

- What is first aid?
- What is in a first aid kit?
- Heart attacks and strokes
- Typical injuries
- Getting too hot or too cold

4.1.2 First-Aider Requirements

The most important element of first aid is to have a trained first aider. First aid qualifications must be updated every 3 years to remain valid.

- Coaches and Leaders must update their first aid every 3 years and [undertake a course](#) according to their level of qualification.
- Clubs and providers are expected to have a named first aider (appointed person), included in their operating procedures. This role will include maintaining the first aid kit/equipment. The named first aider is recommended to have, as a minimum, a valid 1 day (emergency first aid at work) first aid certificate. Publish and make known the location of the first aid kit to members and staff. Regularly check the contents and replenish first aid items as required.

Events are expected to provide first aid to competitors and spectators etc.. Who must know where to go to obtain this first aid. The scale, nature and location of the event will determine the level of first aid/medical support required. It is recommended that an appointed first aider is present at each event.

The first aid and emergency equipment you need will depend on a number of factors. British Canoeing has created an [information sheet](#) on what you need to consider and what a club or event may keep as a first-aid kit.

4.1.3 Defibrillators

Incidents involving competitors and athletes suffering from sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) have been one of the driving forces behind the increasing awareness of the role defibrillators can play in saving lives.

It is now common to see major sporting events and sports clubs where people gather to have an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) on hand. The increased sophistication and design of defibrillators has meant that they can be used without specialist training and are increasingly available in public places.

If someone has had a [cardiac arrest](#), it's vital to call 999 and [start CPR](#). Then you should find out if there is a defibrillator nearby. If you were thinking about getting a defibrillator we recommend that you talk to your local NHS ambulance service first. It's really important that the ambulance service knows about your defibrillator so 999 operators can quickly identify a nearby device in future emergencies. They might also be able to provide advice about where exactly to place the defibrillator and which kind to purchase.

To support their use and effectiveness the availability of a phone to contact the emergency services is critical. You will need to give a precise location of the incident and get specialist support as quickly as possible.

N.B. Prior to defibrillation consideration should be given to recovering a casualty to a position away from the water where defibrillation can take place safely.

The British Heart Foundation has issued a [guide on how and when to use a defibrillator](#). This advice can be found here.

4.2 Water Borne Diseases and Infections

All rivers, however clean they might appear, will contain a level of natural contamination from things such as rotting vegetation, insects and animal activity.

In addition to this there may be other types of contamination including algal blooms (blue green algae), sewerage or chemical contamination. Illnesses are normally caused by bacterial infection, viruses or toxins in the water.

Weils Disease or [Leptospirosis](#)

All water users should be aware of this potentially fatal infection. This is a bacterial infection normally believed to be spread by rat urine, though it can also be transmitted by cat, fox and rabbit urine. Transmission is usually through an open wound or abrasion but can also be caused by ingestion of contaminated water. Symptoms are lethargy, diarrhoea, headaches, vomiting and muscle pain; sometimes referred to as flu like symptoms, if untreated can be fatal.

Prevention

Prevention measures against water borne infection are largely common sense:

- Cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof plasters
- Always wear footwear to avoid cutting the feet
- Avoid capsizing or rolling practice in suspected waters
- Where possible shower soon after the activity
- As a minimum always wash your hands after paddling and before eating or drinking

The [NHS have published information on Leptospirosis](#).

Sport England [provide information on sports hygiene](#).

If you feel ill after paddling you should tell your doctor as soon as possible and let them know where and when you have been on the water.

4.3 Hyperthermia / Heat Exhaustion

When a person's temperature climbs too high and threatens their health, it's known as [hyperthermia](#). Hyperthermia is a general term. It refers to several conditions that can occur when your body's heat-regulation system can't handle the heat in your environment. You are said to have severe hyperthermia if your body temperature is above 104°F (40°C). The average body temperature is 98.6°F (37°C).

There are several stages of hyperthermic conditions:

- Heat stress - your body temperature starts to climb and you're unable to cool yourself through sweating
- Heat Exhaustion - occurs when your body can't cool itself any more
- Heat stroke - occurs when your body temperature reaches above 104°F (40°C). Fainting is often the first sign

Prevention

- Plan your trip or session and think about the risks
- Get a weather forecast before you set out
- Dress appropriately for the weather conditions
- Listen out for anyone complaining about the heat and for any slow or erratic paddling by group members
- Carry spare water and keep hydrated
- Wear or carry a sun hat

Signs and symptoms

It is important to recognise the first signs of hyperthermia before they become severe. The most typical symptoms of hyperthermia (in order of onset) are:

- Feeling uncomfortably hot
- Dizziness
- Weakness

- Nausea
- Thirst
- A headache
- Coordination issues
- Trouble concentrating/confusion
- Skin that's cool and clammy/reduced sweating
- Weak or Rapid pulse
- Unconsciousness

Treatment

It's important that you rest in a cool place and rehydrate as soon as you feel symptoms developing.

Apply wet towels or clothing. You can, of course, always use the water you are paddling on to cool you down. Start drinking water or other fluids with electrolytes that will help restore hydration.

If your symptoms don't improve when you try cooling off and rehydrating, or you see someone who appears to be suffering the symptoms of heat stroke, call your local emergency services immediately.

4.4 Hypothermia / Cold Water Immersion

[Hypothermia](#) occurs when your core body temperature drops dangerously low, below 35 degrees centigrade.

- Exposure over time to cold, wet and windy conditions leading to progressive heat loss, due to a failure to wear the correct clothing for the conditions, immersion in cold water and the failure to rewarm.
- Cold water immersion can also cause Cold Shock. At the moment of immersion, you can lose control of your breathing which causes involuntary gasps of air. This can result in the inability to breathe. Sudden exposure to cold water also causes a rapid increase in heart rate and blood pressure that may result in cardiac arrest.

"Your ability to survive cold water depends on how well you prepare."

4.5 Pre-existing Medical Conditions

If a paddler has a pre-existing medical condition it not need be a barrier to participation, in fact many of our top athletes, competing at International level have pre-existing medical conditions.

Paddlesport is extremely diverse so people can choose the type of paddling that's right for them. Any decision to participate needs to be made on an individual basis.

It is important that pre existing medical conditions are known, not just for the individual's safety, but for those who may need to assist or affect a rescue. Clubs, events, centres, coached or supervised sessions etc. should ensure that participants have completed a medical declaration form and that the condition is known by the relevant coaches, officials or paddlers.

Thousands of different paddling events are run throughout the UK every year. Event organisers have a duty of care to ALL participants. At events, particularly those which involve a journey, it is often impractical for the event organiser to provide enhanced safety cover over and above those measures which cover all participants.

It is not only the paddlesport provider that needs to take action. In an assumed risk sport it is essential that the participant presents and prepares themselves in a way that is safe for themselves and others.

The guidance below includes advice from British Canoeing and links to the relevant specialist professional agencies websites. This provides advice for participants when engaging in sport and physical activity.

4.5.1 Epilepsy

If people have epilepsy and are considering going paddling, British Canoeing's [guidance on paddling with epilepsy](#) provides essential guidance on how to stay safe and enjoy the sport.

It also provides tools that a coach, club or outdoor centre can use to help assess risks and facilitate participation.

4.5.2 Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious life-long health condition that occurs when the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body can't use it properly. Diabetes is when glucose can't enter the body's cells to be used as fuel.

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2:

- Type 1 is where the body attacks and destroys insulin producing cells. About 10% of people with diabetes have type 1.
- Type 2 is where the body does not produce enough insulin to process the glucose leading to its build up.

Physical activity and weight management are important in reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes. Both can be controlled by the administration of insulin. [Diabetes UK publishes useful advice](#) to those people with diabetes on the steps they can take to stay safe when participating in sport and physical activity.

Ensure that participants have completed a medical declaration form and that the condition is known by the relevant coaches, officials or paddlers.

4.5.3 Asthma

Asthma is common, one in eight people in the UK. It affects a significant percentage of elite athletes. Managed correctly asthma need not be a barrier participation in sport.

Paddlers with asthma must declare the condition and should carry an inhaler whilst on the water.

The diagnosis of asthma is usually made by a GP, and treated with a variety of prescription inhalers – often a blue “reliever” and/or a brown “preventer”.

Coaches, officials and paddlers should recognise the symptoms of an asthma attack. Know how to support a person who is suffering from an asthma attack. This is summarised as:

Recognition

- Difficulty in breathing, with trouble exhaling
- Wheezing as the casualty breathes out
- Difficulty speaking and whispering
- Distress and anxiety
- Coughing
- Features of hypoxia, such as a grey-blue tinge to the lips, earlobes and nail beds (cyanosis).

Treatment

Your aims during an asthma attack are to ease the breathing and if necessary get medical help.

Help the paddler to a safe place. If they have a blue reliever inhaler, then encourage them to use this.

- You need to keep the casualty calm and reassure them
- Keep them upright
- Do not leave them alone
- Encourage the casualty to breathe slowly and deeply
- Encourage the casualty to sit in a position that they find most comfortable
- Do not lie the casualty down

A mild asthma attack should ease within a few minutes but if it doesn't encourage the casualty to use their inhaler again. [Advice is issued by Asthma UK](#) on exercising with asthma.

4.5.4 Anaphylaxis (Anaphylactic shock)

[Anaphylaxis](#) is a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction to a trigger such as an allergy. It's also known as anaphylactic shock. A reaction can be triggered by a number of different things including:

- a. Insect stings - particularly wasp and bee stings
 - b. Foods – including nuts, milk, fish, shellfish, eggs and some fruits
 - c. Medicines – including some antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin
- In some cases, there's no obvious trigger.

Symptoms

If an anaphylactic reaction is triggered the symptoms include:

- Feeling lightheaded or faint
- Breathing difficulties – such as fast, shallow breathing, wheezing
- A fast heartbeat
- Clammy skin
- Confusion and anxiety
- Collapsing or losing consciousness

4.6 Lightning

Lightning strikes the ground in Britain about 300,000 times a year. For anyone outdoors, this is a risk that must be considered. Although there is no absolute protection from lightning, measures can be taken to reduce the risk of getting struck and the injury's severity. 30-60 people are struck by lightning each year in Britain, and on average, 3 (5-10%) of these strikes are fatal.

Seeking shelter

Shelter in a building or vehicle is ideal, but if this is not possible:

- If you are on water, get to the shore/bank and away from the water as quickly as possible as water will transmit strikes from further away. Studies have shown that proximity to water is a common factor in lightning strikes
- Leave your paddles and boat, protect yourself
- If you are exposed to the elements with nowhere to shelter, make yourself as small a target as possible by crouching down with your feet together, hands on knees and your head tucked in. This technique keeps as much of you off the ground as possible
- Do not shelter beneath tall or isolated trees, it has been estimated that one in four people struck by lightning are sheltering under trees

This guidance is based on [research by RoSPA](#). (Royal Society for the prevention of Accidents). British Canoeing has also produced a [safety alert for paddling in a thunderstorm](#).

Section 5 - Specialist Guidance

5.1 Sea Safety

British Canoeing has worked with the RNLI to publish [safety information](#) that sets out the steps you need to take to stay safe on the sea.

To stay safe on the sea:

- Always carry a means of [calling for help](#) such as a mobile phone or [personal locator beacon](#) and keep it within reach
- Always Wear a buoyancy aid
- Check the weather and tides. Understand the effect they will have on you
- Use a sea worthy craft capable of coping with the conditions
- Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back
- Wear appropriate clothing for the conditions and your trip
- British Canoeing has published a safety alert on [solo sea kayaking](#)
- Get some [training](#): Contact your local canoe club or outdoor centre/ provider:

- [England](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)

Notifying the Coastguard of your plans / journey

If you contact the Coastguard and notify them of your planned activities/journey, they refer to this as a Traffic Report. British Canoeing has published a [safety alert on notifying the coastguard](#).

Logging your activities or journey is voluntary but HM Coastguard would like paddlers going out on the sea to call in every time to pass on their intentions. There is no legal requirement to do this but if you think your activity may cause concern to a member of the public e.g. rescue training, reduced visibility, worsening sea state/weather conditions, vehicles with roof racks left at harbours while on multiple day expeditions etc. then they would encourage you to contact your local Coastguard Operations Centre.

5.2 Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP) Safety

British Canoeing issues safety guidance on a range of specific technical issues as well as general safety advice.

In response to the growing popularity of SUP's three pieces of essential technical safety guidance have been issued:

- a. Choosing the right leash

To stay safe, it is essential to [choose the correct leash](#) for the environment and conditions you are paddling in. Failure to do so could put your safety at risk.

- b. Personal Floatation Device (PFD) and Buoyancy aid guidance

It is [strongly recommended](#) that you you have both a primary and secondary form of floatation support when stand up paddle boarding.

- c. Weirs

British Canoeing does not endorse that stand up paddleboards are used on weirs and that arrangements should be planned to get out well above the weir and get back on the water well below the construction.

Following an increase in injuries British Canoeing has produced a safety alert on [shallow water relating to stand up paddleboarding](#).

British Canoeing provides [training courses and qualifications](#) for SUP, as well as [general SUP safety information](#).

5.3 Sit-On-Top Safety

Sit-On-Top paddlesport activity is one of the fastest growing areas of paddlesport. Their stability and ease of use has opened up the sport to a wide range of people. This ease of use and the absence of worry about being trapped inside enables people who are new to the sport to use them with confidence. British Canoeing has worked with [AdventureSmart to raise safety awareness when paddling a Sit-on-Top](#).

5.4 Kayak Fishing Safety

Kayaks have long been a means of transportation and a way to access fishing grounds. [Canoe and Kayak fishing](#) has gained popularity as the Sit on Top kayak has been developed. In combining both angling and paddling there are many considerations to take into account including the equipment you need and how to prepare for a trip.

5.5 Gym Safety Guidance

Some clubs and providers may operate or use premises that include a gym to support performance programmes and/or for strength, conditioning and fitness.

To support the management of these facilities British Canoeing's insurers, Towergate, have published a set of recommendations on good practice. These recommendations can be found [here](#).

Section 6 - Competition Disciplines

Paddlesport is composed of an extremely diverse range of activities that reflect different environments and craft used. This is evident in the number and range of competition disciplines run and supported in the UK.

Each [competition discipline](#) operates under a bespoke set of rules which are overseen by the relevant British Canoeing Discipline Specific Committee. An event organiser cannot guarantee that a competition will be absolutely safe to take part in. This being the case, competitors accept responsibilities under the rules of racing and competition. Event organisers have a duty to take reasonable care in their management of an event.

In Paddle sport the competition rules and safety guidance are often influenced by the rules of International competition as set out by The International Canoe Federation.

The following information recognises the principal different practices and considerations that apply to specific competition disciplines.

6.1 Marathon Racing

Canoe Marathon UK provides [rules and regulations](#) on marathon racing which has been developed in conjunction with The Marathon Racing Committee. British Canoeing has provided guidance on the [main practices and considerations that differentiate Marathon Racing](#).

6.2 Ocean Racing

There is specific guidance for Ocean Racing which aims to support paddlers, coaches and event organisers for ocean racing. Further information is provided in the following four documents:

- [Paddler Safety Guidance for Ocean Racing and Ocean Race Training](#)
- [Event Safety for Ocean Race Organisers](#)
- [Ocean Race Course Grading](#)
- [Group Leader / Coach Safety Guidance for Ocean Racing and Ocean Race Training](#)

7 Other Information

7.1 Shoulder Dislocation and Injury

- [Shoulder Dislocation and Injury - Information Sheet](#)

7.2 Offshore Winds and Their Effects on Stand Up Paddleboards

- [OFFSHORE WINDS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDS - Guidance Document](#)

End