



Dragon Boating WA

SAFETY MANUAL

Revised June 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	- 3 -
General safety requirements.....	- 3 -
Swimming test.....	- 3 -
Fitness.....	- 3 -
Medical.....	- 3 -
First aid precautions.....	- 4 -
Impairment through injury or exhaustion.....	- 4 -
The buddy system.....	- 5 -
On the water.....	- 5 -
Strong winds.....	- 5 -
If a small Boat alert has not been issued but winds and waves are increasing:.....	- 5 -
Small boat alerts/strong wind warnings (BoM).....	- 5 -
Paddling at night.....	- 6 -
Capsize procedure.....	- 6 -
Concussion.....	- 7 -
Emergency communication.....	- 8 -
Before getting onto the water.....	- 8 -
Putting boat in and out the water.....	- 9 -
Getting in and out of the boat.....	- 10 -

Introduction

This safety manual is based on the outcomes of a 2012 qualitative risk assessment on dragon boating in Australia prepared by AusDBF. Each State and Territory has endorsed the AusDBF's Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) policy safety policy and the safety manual.

This manual focuses more on specific safety information as it pertains to Dragon Boating in WA. The full AusDBF version is available on their website.

As with any water sport, and because of the environment itself, there is always an element of danger in dragon boating. Because of the size and design of the dragon boat and the water conditions in which training and racing takes place (that is placid water) dragon boating is generally safe and a capsized, especially in such conditions and unless the crew is at fault, is a rarity.

However, people are people and the possibility an accident may occur remains. Dragon Boat Racing is no exception to the rule and it is the duty of all who participate in the sport – competitors, race organisers, coaches and officials alike – to be aware of the potential dangers inherent in the sport. Be safety conscious – not safety extreme – and ensure that dragon boat racing is conducted in a responsible manner.

Managing risks is the responsibility of everyone associated with dragon boating. This includes, but is not limited to, people managing and administering the sport, sweeps, paddlers, drummers, regatta staff (including volunteers), contractors, service providers and officials. Managing these risks is a collective effort and focuses making dragon boating the safest sport in Australia.

General safety requirements

There are several general safety requirements which must be followed for the sport of dragon boating to be safe. These requirements follow.

Swimming test

Dragon boating is a water sport. Accidents on the water can lead to people drowning. To mitigate the risk of drowning all people on the water in a dragon boat must be able to swim confidently 50m in clothing (with a shirt, shorts, sandals as a minimum) and tread water in the same clothes for 10-15 minutes without support.

Any person who cannot satisfy these requirements must wear a lifejacket or a PFD. All paddlers to undertake a swim test annually. This test is best undertaken under the supervision of a nominated club member or members for verification.

Fitness

Paddling fitness is primarily a paddler's responsibility. However, it is important that club coaches assume that not all paddlers are ready for competition at the beginning of the season; they are to cater for paddlers of differing fitness levels, particularly at the beginning of the season, or when a new member joins the club. The intensity of training will increase commensurately.

Regular fitness tests undertaken through benchmarking may ensure that paddlers are fit enough to stand the rigors of dragon boat competition.

Where a coach assesses that a paddler does not have the requisite fitness levels to compete, the paddler must be advised that he/she will not be placed into a race boat until he/she acquires the appropriate fitness levels.

Medical

Dragon boating is a physically intense sport which clearly affects the heart etc.

Any persons who have (or has had) coronary artery disease or a family history of premature coronary artery disease is recommended to seek clearance to paddle from a medical practitioner. And these people are further advised to have, as a minimum, an annual check-up from a medical practitioner.

It is recommended that any persons who possess two other risk factors (from smoking, diabetes, hypertension, high blood fats, family history, inactivity) or a severe risk factor (including treatment for these) get clearance to paddle from a medical practitioner annually. They are also advised to have an exercise stress ECG.

Paddlers who have a medical problem are requested to advise the Coach of their problem at the beginning of the season, or immediately after the problem arises. If a medical problem is exacerbated while undertaking a dragon boat activity, the paddler must notify the coach as soon as possible and cease paddling.

- Privacy act provisions dictate that people do not have to divulge this information.
- If people chose not to surrender their medical information, they must fill out an indemnity form absolving the Club of all responsibility.

It is the responsibility of club members with a medical condition to equip themselves with the appropriate medication while involved in dragon boating – both on and off the water.

Paddlers who are likely to suffer from an ailment or an illness etc while paddling must bring their medication with them on the boat.

A basic first aid kit must be carried in the dragon boat when on the water/training.

Members emergency contacts must be available at all training sessions.

First aid precautions

Paddlers are to:

- Take care to avoid infection if they have open wounds or a skin problem.
- Disinfect any open wounds that might occur during training, as soon as possible.
- Try to avoid getting open wounds wet by either covering them with a waterproof dressing or not training until they have healed.
- Report any injury (particularly a head injury) to the coach or sweep immediately. The Sweep or Coach will assess the situation and take immediate action if the problem warrants it.

Impairment through injury or exhaustion

If a paddler-sweep is injured during a dragon boat activity the boat is to be stopped and the injury assessed by 1st Aider. If it is minor in nature the activity may recommence with an agreement between the sweep and injured person on the best course of action, otherwise the injured person is to be taken to shore as quickly as possible and the appropriate medical treatment given.

If an injury occurs during a regatta the paddler will do a self-assessment and alert the sweep if he/she is uncomfortable. If this occurs the boat is to be brought to a stop and the appropriate action taken.

If a paddler becomes exhausted during a paddling activity he/she must stop paddling until he/she can continue (self-assessment) with the activity. If the exhaustion continues the paddler must inform the sweep who will decide on the best course of action (e.g. place the paddler in the safety boat if one is available, sit them in the back without paddling, return them to shore).

The buddy system

On departure from the shore/wharf the crew must be 'numbered off' from the front of the boat and made aware they are each responsible for the person they are paired with (across the boat) and that in the event of a capsize or the boat being swamped, their first responsibility is to ensure that their partner is safe and well and the correct number of paddlers present (noting it may be the sweep that is missing). As part of this buddy system the two back paddlers are also responsible for the sweep, and the two front paddlers for the drummer.

On the water

- The sweep is in command always regardless of who is taking the training session.
- A head check and a boat balance is to be undertaken immediately the boat leaves the shore/wharf.
- Teams must not train during lightning storms or severe weather events.
- A safety bag with - 15m "silver" non-stretch rope, torch at night, mobile phone and first aid kit – must be carried in the boat always.

Note 2: Local and or State Regulations may require a longer length of (tow) rope to be taken on board the dragon boat. (e.g. NSW Maritime rules stipulate 25 metres, along with a flare and/or mobile phone after dark).

- At least two bailing tools are to be carried in the boat at all times.
- Alcohol and/or illicit drugs are not permitted on boats. Paddlers under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs are not to paddle or be permitted on the boat.
- When more than one boat from a Club is on the water, it is advisable for boats to remain within 200 metres of each other during winter and night time training. This allows a boat to come to the rescue of paddlers within a reasonable amount of time.
- Coaches to ensure that their training plan accommodates this requirement.
- Clubs to note view there is capsize video – available on the AusDBF website.
- For marathon races where the shoreline is more than 50m away, it is recommended that all persons wear PFDs.

Strong winds

If a small Boat alert has not been issued but winds and waves are increasing:

- Coach and sweep must undertake a risk assessment about proceeding into open waters.
- If a decision is taken to continue with training, it recommended that Coaches assess and either reduce the maximum number paddlers on the water to no more than 16 per boat, or PFD be worn by all persons.
- Boats are recommended stay close to the shoreline.
- Sweeps are to steer the Boat into the waves for the first half of the training session and run with the seas in the second half of the session.
- If there are white caps on the water.

Small boat alerts/strong wind warnings (BoM)

Small boat alerts and strong wind warnings (above 26 knots as set down by Bureau of Meteorology) warn us that the paddling conditions will worsen within the specified period. It also means that the likelihood of a boat sinking increases significantly. No paddling is to occur when a small boat alert or strong wind warning has been issued. Refer to local conditions and laws.

The only exception to this rule is when the weather is benign at the time of paddling, and the training area is well protected from wind and/or waves. If these conditions exist, coaches and sweeps are to undertake (and record) a risk assessment to determine if it is safe to proceed onto the water. If the decision is made that it is safe to proceed, boats must stay within proximity of the shoreline and proceed into the direction of the wind.

Paddling at night

- Sweeps must be particularly vigilant at night. In addition sweeps are to ensure that boat lights are fitted on the dragon boat between published sunset and sun rise and in periods of reduced visibility (if possible).
- The lights are to be waterproof and brightly visible throughout the session.
- There is to be one white light at the front of the boat that had 360 degrees visibility; or light on the front and back with 180 degrees visibility.
- At least one high powered torch is to be carried between sunset and sunrise.
- At least two bailing tools are to be carried in the boat.
- Sweeps must have an excellent working knowledge of the marine 'rule of the road' requirements.
- All sweeps to know their local area so that if an ambulance is called, they know the street address for directions.
- Sweeps are encouraged to carry a whistle and a cyalume stick with them to attract attention in the event of trouble.
- Sweeps are to ensure that their dragon boat crews are appropriately dressed for winter paddling.

Further information on light requirements is available at

<http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/imate/navigational-lights.asp>

Capsize procedure

If a dragon boat sinks or capsizes the following must be followed to ensure minimal harm to people.

- The crew must remain calm.
- Each paddler should immediately account for their buddy.
- The sweep should immediately ensure that all the crew are accounted for by a head count.
- The crew must stay with the dragon boat.
- No one is to swim underneath an overturned dragon boat.
- The boat can be used as a floating platform, provided the crew space themselves evenly around the dragon boat.
- **If paddlers are missing ring "000" or "112" for emergency services.**

If the boat is overturned, the sweep may authorise the dragon boat to be rolled back to the upturned position and used to support the paddlers by individuals holding onto the gunwales providing it is safe to do so.

In all situations the sweep should remain in control of the crew.

In a **race situation**, the paddlers should await the arrival of the rescue boats, and continue as follows:

- The sweep remains in the water until all the members of his/her crew have been rescued.
- The crew may recover their paddles if they are within easy reach.
- If there are rescue boats nearby, then the crews should not attempt to retrieve their paddles.
- The main concern should be paddlers' welfare.
- The sweep should call out to the rescue boat and confirm when it is safe to move towards the dragon boat.

On the arrival of the rescue boats, the crew should move as directed by the operators of the rescue boats.

- If there are insufficient rescue boats to rescue all the crew in one go and the water conditions are kind, or it is shallow, crew members can remain with the dragon boat and start to swim it to the nearest shore. This should only be done under the control of the sweep and when the swimmers are capable and not at risk.

Once the crew is safe a rescue boat may be used to recover the dragon boat.

If a **rescue boat is not immediately available** the Sweep, after accounting for all paddlers, must take action to ensure that all paddlers do not remain in the water longer than is necessary. This is particularly the case in winter paddling where immersion in the water will result in hypothermia.

- As a rule, the Sweep must instruct paddlers to swim together (as a group) without exerting too much energy, to the nearest point of land.
- It is important that all paddlers swim together; stronger swimmers helping the weaker ones.
- The whole team should move with the boat.
- Paddlers should not swim on ahead or be left behind.
- The sweep (or nominated person in charge) is to do several head counts as the boat is taken to safety, and again once on shore.
- If there are other water craft present paddlers should attempt to 'flag' them down for assistance.

If the environmental conditions allow it the sweep may instruct a couple of paddlers to remain with the boat to assist in its rescue. BUT the paddlers remaining behind must be volunteers and must be fit and strong swimmers.

Concussion

Concussion is defined as a mild brain injury caused by trauma that results in temporary dysfunction of the brain. The trauma can be direct as from a blow to the head or indirect (whiplash). Concussion generally causes temporary loss of brain skills such as memory, thinking abilities and balance.

In dragon boating it can be caused by a fall and hitting your head on the boat as you get in or out of the boat, by a paddle, or by another boat in the case of a collision

Paramount in this situation is the welfare of the concussed person.

Coaches or those responsible for observing the welfare of the paddlers, shall keenly observe the paddling session and be fully cognisant of any occurrence that appears to have rendered a paddler concussed.

Other than consciousness, signs to observe include loss of balance, irritability, pale complexion, poor concentration, slow or altered verbal skills, inappropriate behaviour, mental confusion and memory loss.

The paddler should be removed from the paddling session and medically attended to with the best facility immediately available. Once safely removed, the paddlers condition must be monitored to determine the extent of the injury. This shall be reported to the coach.

Generally, physicians with expertise in concussion are not present when the concussion is sustained, and the initial assessment of an injured paddler is done by the coach, sweep or member with first aid, however it is recommended that a person who has sustained a head injury is taken to Accident and Emergency to be assessed by a Doctor.

Any paddler assessed as concussed shall not return to paddling until a medical certificate by a registered medical practitioner is provided clearly stating the paddler can return to full participation.

Emergency communication

A list of vital/emergency telephone numbers should be available at all training sessions and inside every safety boat to include:

- Doctor / Ambulance /Police
- Fire Department
- Local hospital casualty department
- The emergency service that can provide the quickest on-water response
- The possible need for emergency communication from the water should be considered whether by two-way radio or by mobile phone.

Before getting onto the water

Each site has its own unique conditions that must be assessed for risk to paddlers before they get into the boat. Many sites are far from clean and the entry into the water may have dangers (e.g. broken glass and sometimes syringes).

At night the dragon boat storage area and launch area should be well lit by torches or in built lighting before paddlers move in or around it.

All paddlers are to stretch and warm up before and after training and racing.

All paddlers are to ensure that they are dressed appropriately for the conditions.

During the period from published sunset to sunrise and during periods of reduced visibility the appropriate lighting is to be attached to the boats. Refer to local laws. Under no circumstance is the dragon boat to proceed onto the water if the batteries powering the lights are lacking charge.

Prior to proceeding onto the water for a training session and at the beginning of a dragon boat event (regatta) a safety brief must be undertaken. There are no fixed rules required for a safety brief but all briefs must include:

- Prevailing and anticipated weather conditions.
- If lifejackets/PFDs are to be worn.

- Expected time off water.
- The paddling plan (not during regattas).
- The need for hydration and proper protective clothing.
- Advise people requiring medication to take it with them. (e.g. Puffer etc).

There are other issues that a sweep/coach may wish to include in his/her safety brief. Other issues for consideration (but not mandatory) are:

- Advising people that they are also responsible for safety and should speak up if they become concerned while on the water.
- What to do in the event of sinking/capsizing (best done on water after boat balance undertaken and before paddling).
- What to do in the event of an injury or exhaustion.
- If anyone has a medical condition that has not been declared previously.

Clubs should schedule into their annual training program a comprehensive safety brief for:

- All rookies on joining the Club.
- All club members every three months during the paddling season with the first being at the beginning of the season.

All new paddlers are to be provided technique instruction on joining a club by a qualified coach.

Putting boat in and out the water

- Safe lifting technique (bend at the knees, not at the back) when lifting and carrying the boats.
- Make sure enough people are there to carry the boat (suggested min 10).
- When lowering a dragon boat ensure it is put down slowly with paddlers bending at the knees.
-
- People with an existing injury are not to lift the boat if their injury is likely to be affected.
- Decide the seating positions of paddlers before entering the dragon boat. Have paddlers of similar weight seated with one another.
- A dragon boat must not be pushed into the water whilst paddlers are standing. If a dragon boat is to be moved advise those standing to be seated and only then move the dragon boat.
- Paddlers should wear suitable footwear in a dragon boat.
- Paddlers unable to complete the swim test must be advised to wear a life jacket or PFD.
- One person is to hold the front of the boat to steady it (not weight bearing), pointing the back of the boat into the water.
- Paddlers are to take extreme care to not be crushed between boats or between the boat and storage cradles. This can be done by looking out for each other as well as being vigilant.

Getting in and out of the boat

The most likely time a capsize will occur is when paddlers are loading into or getting out of a dragon boat and the following guidelines should be observed:

- If loading from a pontoon/jetty paddlers should load from the middle of the boat, commencing with rows one (1) and ten (10) alternatively, sitting in the centre of the seat until their buddy boards. Paddlers on the water side should help to stabilise the boat while others enter.
 - The dragon boat must be held securely, with the side of the dragon boat butted against the side of the pontoon.
- If loading from a beach or ramp, make sure paddlers load from the rear of the boat first (i.e. paddlers should walk down the boat with seat ten (10) loading first, then seat nine (9) and so on.
- The back of the dragon boat should be in the water.
 - Two paddlers hold the front of the dragon boat steady.
 - Paddlers load and unload from the front of the dragon boat.
 - The strokes (front row) and the drummer should be the last to enter and the first to leave the dragon boat.
- Paddlers must avoid stepping onto the buoyancy chamber at the front and back of the Boat. (These are safety devices and are not designed to take weight).
- When loading and unloading, the paddlers should avoid erratic movements.
- Paddlers should keep their weight low when moving through the dragon boat.
- At night the paddler's pathway is to be illuminated by torches.
- Once seated, a paddler must sit on the seat in the middle of the dragon boat. Only when their paddling partner is about to sit down should they move to their paddling side.

Note : The sweep is always first on board and last to leave.

- All paddlers should know their buddy seated next to them. Seat 1 (or the front row) after looks the drummer and the sweep by seat 10 (or the last row).
- When paddlers are seated, they should have their paddles in the "Paddles Flat Position" (or brace position).
- Once all paddlers are seated, the sweep must complete a head count.
- Number 1 is the drummer followed by number 2 left, number 3 right, number 4 left number 5 right and so on till the sweep is counted (i.e. number 22 in a full boat).

Finally, the sweep must ensure the dragon boat is balanced before leaving the shore. If after leaving the shore the dragon boat is still unbalanced, stop the dragon boat and make adjustments i.e. swap the paddlers from left to right and vice versa.