



SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR PADDLERS

Dragon boats are one of the smallest crafts on the water. The boats are very low and slow relative to other boats. The V&A Waterfront is a working harbour, with small, medium, large and very large boats moving around on a regular basis. For this reason, safety awareness is really important.

1. Adhere to all venue requirements

- a. The Marina management requires the following from paddlers:
 - i. Signing of indemnity forms and providing all required information, including emergency contact and medical practitioner (for club members)
 - ii. Wearing of lifejackets if you cannot swim 50m fully clothed
 - iii. Winter paddling rules regarding leaving the jetty in a group with lights.

2. Listen to the helm

- a. Understand that while this is a safe sport, an accident can be life-threatening. The helm is responsible for safety on the boat. In all instances, you must **follow the instruction of the helm**, even if there is a coach on the boat who is giving different instruction for the exercise.
- b. Understand that while this is a social sport, chatting on the boat during training means that you cannot hear the helm make calls or the coach give the exercise. Your chatting also ensures that paddlers in front of you or behind you cannot hear the helm or the coach. **So once the exercise begins – please stop chatting.** There is lots of time after paddling to catch up on your teammates' social lives.
- c. Using your phone to take photos while paddling means that your paddle isn't in the water and you're not helping the team move the boat or follow any emergency calls from the helm. **Taking of photos is only allowed when the boat has stopped, and the helm has called for a water break.** Not every stop falls into that category. Paddlers who cannot stick to this rule will have to store their phones in one of the drybags on the boat.
- d. Pay attention to the helm's calls. Helms use the paddlers to control the boat.
 - i. **'stop the boat'** means your paddle goes into the water and stays in the water until the boat is at a full stop or the helm changes the instruction. It is different to **'slow the boat'**, which means the same action as 'stop', but then taking the paddle out of the water, allowing the boat to continue drifting.

- ii. ‘**stop paddling**’ or ‘**let it ride**’, simply means you can take a break.
- iii. ‘**hold water**’ means keeping your paddle upright (90°) in the water and is usually used in the setup for racing, holding the boat in place. It is the same action when a helm calls ‘stop the boat’ – once the boat has come to a stop, holding water will keep the boat from drifting.
- iv. The helm often turns the boat using paddlers on one side or the other and front, middle or back paddlers. Know what your position is on the boat and listen to those calls carefully.
- v. ‘**brace the boat**’ means your paddle should be flat on the water. This is used in a variety of situations, but most often when paddlers are swapping sides or moving around the boat. This is not a chance to drink water or take photos, while other paddlers are ‘bracing’ – see section below on balance.
- e. Accidents can happen when getting onto or off the boat. Follow normal safety rules for both.
 - i. Always **get onto the boat one by one** and wait till paddlers are seated before you get on when it is your turn. Your fellow paddlers won’t thank you for upending them inside the boat.
 - ii. When embarking and disembarking, check that the boat is **securely moored** (tied up), otherwise it may drift from the side, leaving you with the splits and in the water – very undignified.
 - iii. Don’t try to get onto the boat at a point where there is a big **gap between the jetty and the boat**. You may land up in the gap – also very undignified and probably painful. If you are seated at the back of the boat, get on in the middle and walk to your seat at the back.
 - iv. Always **get off the boat from the front – one by one**. If you are at the back, walk forward till you get to a point where there is no gap.
 - v. When helping a paddler out of the boat, do not grip just with your hands – at the end of paddling hands are wet and you are likely to lose their grip. **Grip around the wrist or just above**. This is a much stronger grip and will be connecting with drier skin so much less chance of losing the hold.
 - vi. When standing on the seats while getting into or out of the boat, stand either on the middle (above the central pillar supporting the seat) or on the edge, (above the lip on the side of the boat supporting the seat).

3. Understand the importance of balance on the boat.

- a. Dragon boats have no keel. Helms balance the boat by ensuring that the weight distribution across the boat and on both sides is optimal for the weather conditions. Helms will generally seat paddlers and move them around to get optimal balance. It is important to **follow helm instructions on seating**.
- b. Paddlers must **never stand up or shift sides on the boat without a clear instruction from the helm**. This action could result in either the helm being flipped off the back of the boat or the boat flipping over as other paddlers shift to compensate for the imbalance.

- c. Small shifts in a paddler's position will also affect the balance. A paddler taking their paddle out of the water and sitting upright or a paddler leaning into the boat will impact on the balance. A paddler failing to brace the boat when people are moving around the boat can also impact negatively on the balance.
- d. The helm generally manages balance by being alert and shifting their own position.
- e. Unexpected shifts, like someone getting out of the way of a splash (accidental or horseplay) can significantly impact on the balance, especially when other paddlers shift their weight to compensate. This is how boats get flipped or helms get flipped off the back of the boat. So – ***no horseplay on the boat***. And expect to get accidentally splashed sometimes – it is a water sport.
- f. When someone gets off during a session, the helm may ask a paddler to shift position or side to ensure balance. Do not argue with a helm who is balancing or rebalancing the boat. If you cannot paddle on the side you're being asked to paddle and no-one else can shift, then you may need to take a rest for that part of the session, to ensure a safe, balanced boat.

4. Listen to your body

- a. Paddling is a strenuous sport and for this reason it is important that you listen to your body to avoid injury or illness. It is important that the helm is aware of any medical condition.
- b. If you have been ill with a virus, ***wait for two weeks*** before you start paddling again. This is an extremely important rule.
- c. If you suffer from asthma, diabetes or epilepsy, make sure you have your medication or snack on the boat with you.
- d. Do not forget your ***hat, water bottle and suncream*** when paddling in summer. This applies to evening paddling as well, on really hot sunny evenings.
- e. If you have an injury that could be worsened by paddling, make sure your physio or GP gives you the go-ahead to paddle, to ensure you avoid re-injuring yourself.
- f. If you need to take it easy, and ease back into paddling, ***make sure the helm/coach is aware***, so that they accommodate this during exercise.
- g. Take the warm-up (on shore or on boat) and after-paddling stretches seriously. Feel those stretches.

5. Capsize drill: In the very unlikely event of a capsize, these are the rules.

- a. Know who is sitting next to you on the boat. This is the person you will look out for in the event of a capsize
 - i. If you are at the front or the back, you will also look out for the drummer or helm.
 - ii. If you have no-one sitting next to you, check who is in front & behind you.
- b. If the boat capsizes, as soon as you come up, look for your partner and/or the paddlers in front of and behind you. Shout if you notice anyone missing.
- c. Then swim to the boat. Do not try to swim to the sides of the Marina or the jetties. They are encrusted with barnacles and will injure you.

- d. The helm will direct paddlers to collect the paddles. All the other paddlers must follow the helm instructions to flip the boat over
- e. As soon as the boat has been flipped, the helm will instruct the smallest paddler to get into the boat. Other paddlers will assist and the first paddler in, will find the bailers and start bailing water out of the boat.
- f. Paddlers will get in, one by one, as the water level inside the boat drops, and will help with the bailing. This will continue until all the paddlers are back in the boat.
- g. The helm will then take the boat back in, after collecting any items still floating around.