

## **Safety for Dragon Boat Paddlers**

Effective May 1, 2007

Before you get into the dragon boat and experience the thrill and fun of paddling, safety should be your number one priority. The list below provides some suggestions to help you and your teammates not only to have fun but to be safe.

### **A. Safety Plan**

1. Each team member is responsible for his or her own safety at all times while engaging in activities related to practicing and racing in dragon boats
2. The steersperson is in charge of and responsible for your boat at all times. His/her commands must be obeyed to insure everyone's safety
3. Always listen to your steersperson for directions even if you hear "HOLD THE BOAT" and you are in the middle of a race
4. A buddy system is used in the event of a medical emergency or capsizing

### **B. Before Boarding**

1. Dress appropriately
2. Take a bottle of water with you
3. Apply proper sun protection, and/or wear a hat
4. Stretching and moderate exercise is advisable before paddling
5. The team should review the paddling commands with the steersperson
6. The steersperson will communicate the safety and emergency procedures with the team before going out
7. Two people on each team should have whistles attached to their life vests for use as a warning signal in case of emergency

### **C. Life Jackets**

1. All paddlers must wear an approved lifejacket at all times while on the water (PFD - Personal Floatation Device). Life jackets are available at Lloyd Hall, or you may bring your own
2. After your practice, please return your paddles to the barrel outside of the gymnasium door, and attach your life vest to the railings inside the door to the left of the gymnasium doors

### **D. Swimming Ability**

If you are a non-swimmer, you should inform your team captain, and you or your Captain must inform the steersperson, drummer, and your buddy.

### **E. Loading Procedure**

1. Your Captain should know the paddlers' weights and balance the boat accordingly
2. Loading procedure should be done row by row...first port side then starboard side. The recommended process is middle rows first. Listen for the steersperson and/or drummer before getting in or out of the boat. Only one person should be getting in or out of the boat at a time
3. Once loaded, the steersperson should remind the paddlers about the buddy system and ask them to identify their buddy
4. For unloading, repeat the loading procedure backwards

### **F. Boat Commands**

1. To be able to control the boat and avoid collisions, all paddlers must know the paddling commands
2. The commands should be reviewed with your steersperson at the dock each time you go out
3. Commands: hold water (paddle in the water to stop the boat), let it ride (stop paddling and rest the paddle on your lap), and back paddle
4. Usually the drummer will give the commands, but commands from the steersperson need to be followed and take precedence at all times

## **G. Paddling**

1. To help maintain boat stability, make no sudden moves in the boat. According to the Rules of the River, there are times when boats must continue to paddle (unless doing so would cause a collision):
2. Paddling up and across the river
3. Paddling through bridge
4. When returning to the docks (or anytime when approaching a stationary object), always keep hands off of the boat gunwales. Failure to do so may result in serious injury to your fingers or hand if they are trapped between the boat and the stationary object

## **H. Hydration**

Maintain hydration by drinking fluids before getting into the boat and during those times when your boat stops for any reason

## **I. Exertion Level**

Paddling for 500 meters (around 2½ to 3 minutes) is not easy and can be exhausting. If you need to rest at any time, then do so. Take your paddle out of the water and hold it up above your lap while you rest

## **J. Noise Level**

1. Paddlers should restrict talking in the boat. They need to pay attention to the directions given by the drummer and steersperson. The noise makes it difficult for other paddlers to hear the directions. In addition, the drummer and steersperson must be able to communicate effectively from the bow to the stern of the boat
2. When on the water, help can be a long way off. If someone should have a heart attack, stroke, or other medical emergency, it is imperative that everyone remains silent as the steersperson gives directions

## **K. Boat Capsizing**

1. Dragon boats can capsize
2. Unless otherwise instructed, paddlers should stay with the boat, hold onto it, do not try to swim to shore, and wait until help comes
3. You must follow the directions of the steersperson and rescue personnel. The steersperson will remain in charge of the team until rescue personnel arrive. Once the rescue boat has arrived, they are in charge
4. Use a buddy system. Your buddy is the person sitting beside you in your row. The paddlers in the first row (row 1) of the boat are also buddies with the drummer, and the paddlers in the last row (row 10) are buddies with the steersperson
5. If you find yourself under the boat, there will be an air pocket available for you to catch your breath and get your bearings. Feel your way to the side of the boat and then surface on the outside
6. Locate or call out for your buddy and be sure he/she is safe
7. If other paddlers are injured or have difficulty reaching the boat, give them assistance and make the steersperson or rescue boat aware of the situation
8. The steersperson will take a head count
9. If the boat capsizes, it may not right itself. The steersperson will determine if anyone is trapped under the dragon boat, and act accordingly
10. If the dragon boat is upside down after capsizing, the steersperson may ask the team to help roll the boat to its upright position. Before that can be done, all paddlers must be accounted for. A strong swimmer may be asked to swim under the boat from one end to the other looking for paddlers
11. People shouting and making noise will cause confusion. In the event of an emergency, every paddler has to be ready to follow instructions