

Peak Paddlers Canoe Club generic sea kayaking risk assessment and risk management plan

Canoeing is ‘an assumed risk’, ‘water contact’ activity however serious accidents are very rare. More people drown whilst cycling than canoeing according to the BCU. Using this risk assessment as a guide to plan your sea kayaking trip, along with your own knowledge and experience, will help you to manage any risks arising from the activity.

Hazard	Risk	Controls
Planning the activity		
Objective dangers.	The planned journey may encounter tide-races, over-falls or stretches of exposed coast line beyond the paddling ability of group members.	Careful use of maps, charts and weather reports combined with knowledge of individuals’ paddling abilities in the group to plan accordingly.
Relatives and friends poorly informed about the trip.	Concerned friends and relatives either raise an alarm unnecessarily or fail to raise the alarm when needed.	Provide friends and relatives with a trip plan including estimated times of its start and finish.

The Group

Different levels of experience in the group.	The journey or activity may stretch some participants beyond their ability to remain safe.	Plan the activity to take account of all skill levels keeping the group safe. More experienced members of the group monitor and support the less experienced throughout the journey.
Members lacking equipment or equipment they have is of an inadequate standard for the proposed activity.	Individuals or the group put at risk of harm.	Ensure that the group has adequate equipment and clothing of the required standard for the activity. Spare dry clothing should be carried by all.

<p>Poor health or lack of fitness.</p>	<p>Individuals find they are unable to complete the journey or safely take part in the activity.</p>	<p>Either adapt the plan so it is safe to include all of the group or the leader should ask anybody in poor health not to take part in an activity which is likely to be beyond their capacity to participate safely.</p>
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Hazard	Risk	Controls
Setting out		
Manual handling of boats on and off vehicles and trailers.	Injuries to shoulders and back.	Handle boats using at least two people and use trolleys if possible.
Difficult launching and landing areas.	Trips and falls resulting in injury.	Plan launching and landing at states of tide for easy access. Use several people to move boats from shore to sea and when landing.
Surf.	Injury to person or damage to boats.	Assess surf conditions and the potential risk to the group members and their boats when launching and landing.
Weather and sea conditions.	Worse than predicted conditions or deteriorating conditions may compromise the safety of the group.	Make an on the spot assessment whether the planned trip should go ahead. Either cancel the trip or adapt the trip plan to maintain safety according to the prevailing weather and sea conditions.
Failure to communicate group intention to coast guard.	Activity may be interpreted as an incident by people on shore.	Call the coast guard by telephone or radio before setting out.
No agreed communication signals or call signs between group members.	Group management is impaired with the potential for misinterpretation of signals and maintenance of group safety.	Agree a set of signals for occasions when spoken communication cannot be used, such as in a noisy surf environment. Agree the marine radio wave band to be used for group communication and call signs for members.

Hazard	Risk	Controls
On the sea		
Group members separate.	Communication is impaired compromising group safety potentially leading to the loss of contact with individuals.	Keep the group paddling close enough together for spoken communication to be heard. If the group decides to split up ensure this is explicitly agreed and a dynamic risk assessment is made and the controls for consequent risks put in place.
Travelling close to a rocky shore/rock hopping.	Personal injury. Damage to boat.	Participants to wear a helmet. Carry a first aid kit and know how to use it. Carry a boat repair kit and know how to use it.
Caves.	Injury or entrapment from sudden sea surges.	Enter caves with care taking note of head room, width and prevailing wave and sea conditions. Ensure a member of the group remains outside the cave to warn of incoming waves that may present a hazard to those inside the cave.
Immersion in cold water.	Immersion in cold water is one of the main causes of death for sea kayakers, and cold shock does occasionally kill a highly competent kayaker before nearby friends can retrieve him.	Wear kayak clothing which will keep you comfortable in your kayak and reasonably comfortable during a 15-minute immersion. Know how to do deep water rescues for able bodied and injured or unconscious paddlers.
Weather or sea conditions have an adverse effect on members' wellbeing.	Hypothermia, overheating, seasickness.	Carry spare clothing, hot/cold drinks, emergency group shelter, and emergency foil blanket. Build an escape route in to the trip plan.

<p>An incident occurs, for example, in an area where it is not possible to land or which requires urgent medical attention or rescue.</p>	<p>A delay in getting help diminishes survival time.</p>	<p>Know how to perform deep water rescues for able bodied paddlers and injured or unconscious paddlers. Carry a first aid kit and know how to use it. Group members should carry marine VHF radios and know how to use them. Carry a mobile phone as a back-up, flares and/or other means of signalling, e.g. laser light, PLB.</p>
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