

Annual Safety Report 2023

Introduction

Throughout 2023 British Canoeing has driven significant progress in the area of safety. From launching its first Safety Campaign to hosting its inaugural in-person Safety Conference, and sharing an array of safety alerts and research in between. Over the past year participation and interest in paddlesport activities has remained steady. Growth in participation and interest in canoeing and kayaking has been at a slower rate than the years that followed the pandemic. Interest and participation in stand up paddleboarding also remains steady, yet not as rapid as in previous years. Although participation rates have slowed, helping people to enjoy paddlesport safely remains key across all work carried out by the organisation. Safeguarding, safety, and welfare remain as fundamental cross-cutting themes running through British Canoeing's Strategic Plan, "[Stronger Together](#)". Building on these themes, British Canoeing has also launched its new strategy, "[Safer Together](#)", which outlines its framework for reaching a safer culture. Going forwards, British Canoeing will focus on collaboration with key stakeholders to raise awareness of safety.

Strategic Work

Following on from the key safety work carried out in 2022, a significant amount of work has been undertaken in the past year to address a variety of safety issues. British Canoeing understands the importance of collaboration in raising awareness of safety amongst the paddlesport community. A shift towards a more proactive approach has seen British Canoeing engage with an increased number of new key stakeholders to help raise awareness of safety among new and novice paddlers. Following appointment in 2022, the Safety Lead post has become a well-established role both within British Canoeing and beyond with other organisations.

Parliamentary and Industry Representation

- Attendance of the National Water Safety Conference, hosted by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, in Cardiff.
- Attendance of the Drowning Prevention Week Reception, hosted by the Royal Life Saving Society, the Thames Pavilion, House of Commons.
- Continued work with the Government Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPPS) including attendance of regular online meetings.
- Responded to the UK Product Safety Review Consultation.
- Working with the Government Agency the [Office for Product Safety and Standards](#) to ensure appropriate reach and targeted audience to paddlesport activity recalls.

Point of Sale - Non-Specialist Retailers

Following on from the work with non-specialist retailers in 2022, British Canoeing has this year engaged with and supported over ten non-specialist retailers, including, major manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, both in store and online. Support with paddlesport safety has also been provided to members of the British Retail Consortium, the UK's key trade association, with over two hundred major retailers and thousands of independents, via online meetings, and ongoing correspondence.

British Canoeing has supported manufacturers, distributors and retailers by providing its safety information for use at the point of sale, including, infographics and unique QR codes linked to the Go Paddling website, and tracked website links to safety information, as well as additional support through online meetings and answering ad hoc safety questions. This collaboration is key to sharing and promoting clear, accurate, consistent safety advice and raising awareness of safety among new and novice paddlers.

Safety Campaign - "Paddle Safely"

British Canoeing and the RNLI launched a joint safety campaign on 28th June 2023. This joint campaign aimed to raise awareness of safety among new and novice paddlers based on five key safety messages. The safety campaign was also shared with key partners to ask for support in sharing these key messages. The campaign took place both digitally, using social media, and "on the ground" via volunteers. A range of safety resources were produced, including an online training package for partners, social media assets, and physical leaflets.

During this time, British Canoeing worked with a key manufacturer, Wilton Bradley, on a [short video](#) sharing the five key messages from the campaign. As the safety messaging for new and novice paddlers is unlikely to change, this video will continue to be used as a supporting resource. Wilton Bradley have also shared this video with their distributors, such as major supermarkets, retail stores including Tesco's, Decathlon, and online retailers.

Overall, the campaign in its first year received a good level of engagement both digitally and on the ground. Interaction on social media was higher in July than August and with over 13,000 leaflets distributed to a range of organisations. The campaign also generated positive media coverage including ITV primetime news and radio interviews taking place with local BBC stations in Cornwall, Cumbria, and Anglesey.

Leaflets, Social Media Assets, Online Training Package via YouTube



Safety Communication

As the National Governing Body, British Canoeing has communicated safety messaging using a variety of methods over the past year via its own website, [GoPaddling website](#), and social media channels. This communication has been seasonal, reflected certain safety issues, or provided an update to best practice. Clear, concise, and consistent messaging is key to raising awareness of the importance of safety. British Canoeing has gained a high level of interaction with its safety communications over the past year.

British Canoeing Social Media Channels [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#)
Go Paddling Social Media Channels: [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#)

Safety Conference

British Canoeing hosted its first Safety Conference on 15th November 2023 at the Heart of England Conference and Events Centre in the West Midlands. The main focus of the conference was Stand-Up Paddleboard (SUP) safety in light of the rapid increase in participation and increase in SUP related notable events and incidents. The conference brought together over 70 representatives from a wide variety of strategic organisations, including, Government Offices, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Royal Life Saving Society, the Environment Agency, The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity, as well as key manufacturers and retailers.

The Safety Conference provided a key opportunity for delegates to hear from a range of key speakers, listen to research, and discuss SUP safety in person and how we as a collective can raise awareness of safety to the SUP community

Safety Conference, Wednesday 15th November 2023



Guidance

Safety Updates

Throughout 2023 British Canoeing published the following safety updates in response to emerging or immediate issues relating to safety:

Safety Alerts

- [Quick Release Leash Systems in a White-Water Environment](#)
- [Unregistered Personal Locator Beacons \(PLBs\)](#)

Information Sheets

- [Stand Up Paddleboard \(SUP\) Safety - Choosing the Right Leash \(2023\)](#)
- [Offshore Winds and their Effects on Stand-Up Paddleboards](#)
- [Shoulder Dislocation and Injury](#)

Case Studies

Case studies provide the opportunity to share others' experience and key learnings with the wider paddlesport community. With the permission and support of those involved, identifying details are removed and incidents are able to be developed into case studies. These case studies usually are created from incident reports received through our [Incident Reporting Online Form](#) and aim to highlight good practice. If you would be interested in providing a case study please contact safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk. Two case studies were published in 2023:

- [Commercial Stand Up Paddleboarding Accident, Haverfordwest: Lessons Learnt from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch Report](#) - on the lessons to be learned by every instructor, coach, leader and deployer from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch report into the Commercial Stand Up Paddleboarding Accident at Haverfordwest was published.
- [Competitions and Events: Craft Floatation](#) - on the importance of boat buoyancy during events and competitions.
- [Coasteering Fatality, Dorset](#) - on the lessons to be learned by every outdoor instructor, coach, leader and deployer into the death of a client in Dorset in 2019.

Product Recalls

British Canoeing is working with the Government Agency, the [Office for Product Standards and Safety](#) and attends periodic meetings, as well as receives alerts of product recalls. This increases our awareness of recalls of paddlesport related products. These recalls are then shared on our Safety Alerts page and via social media platforms. Last year, product recalls were issued relating to certain stand up paddleboards and PFDs. In 2023 the the product recalls below were shared:

- [Lifejacket Recall Notice](#)
- [Lifejacket Recall Notice](#)
- [Children's Buoyancy Aid Recall Notice](#)
- [Children's Buoyancy Aid Recall Notice](#)

Training

Training Awards

A range of new training awards were designed to reflect the 2021 safety review developing knowledge and skills required by the paddlesport community:

- [Paddlesport Safety & Rescue](#)
- [Sea Kayak Safety and Rescue](#)
- [Inland Open Water Safety and Rescue](#)
- [Surf Kayak Safety and Rescue](#)
- [Introduction to White Water Safety](#)
- [White Water Safety](#)
- [Advanced White Water Safety](#)

New Safety Resources

British Canoeing has created a [new page](#) to support the development of safety skills.

New Manual Handling for Paddlesport eLearning

British Canoeing's New [Manual Handling for Paddlesport eLearning](#) has been completed by over 700 hundred unique users since its launch in January.

Webinar - "Including the Buzz of Weirs"

A popular series of webinars were held over the year focusing on the risks, safety management and safe use of weirs for recreation and leaders. These were attended by over 300 individuals in 2023.

Trauma Risk Management Training (TRiM)

Refresher training was undertaken by British Canoeing Staff and also attended by colleagues from the Scottish Canoeing Association.

Research

Two key pieces of research have been commissioned by British Canoeing in 2023:

Offshore Winds and Their Effects on Stand-Up Paddleboards

In light of continued increase in the volume of incidents and callouts relating to Stand Up Paddleboards being blown or swept out to sea, British Canoeing commissioned [research into the effects of offshore winds](#) on Stand Up Paddleboarders. This concluded that the SUP brake position was the most effective at minimising drift if caught in an offshore wind, allowing time to call for help in a safe position. This updated guidance was published and shared with the paddlesport community.

Quick Release Leash Systems in a White-Water Environment (Stand Up Paddleboard)

Another piece of research was undertaken by Dr Loel Collins into the [use of quick release leash systems for Stand-Up Paddleboards in a white-water environment](#). After careful consideration British Canoeing updated guidance to **recommend** that no leash is worn in a white-water environment. Further research will be undertaken to determine guidance in a flow environment.

Other work

Club Newsletter

- Every month, British Canoeing's club newsletter now contains a safety update.

Notable Events (Near Misses)

- Throughout 2023 British Canoeing shared reminders on the importance of reporting [notable events](#) (near misses) and will continue to do so to help our understanding of themes.

Reported Incidents

The number of incidents reported through British Canoeing's Incident Reporting Online Form in 2023 has been at a similar level to 2022. In addition, these reported incidents have involved a variety of craft, disciplines, and scenarios in contrast to previous years. The amount and range of incident reports demonstrates that a more positive attitude around incident reporting is evolving. British Canoeing will continue to encourage incident reporting to help develop our understanding of incidents and identify any themes.

As well as British Canoeing's reported incidents, data is also shared between the HM Coastguard, RNLI and RoSPA who keep the UK wide Water Incident Database (WAID). The incidents submitted are used to identify any patterns or clusters of accidents or injury that could indicate wider problems within the sport.

A range of incidents have been reported to British Canoeing throughout 2023. Notable events (near misses) have been the most frequent type of incident seen this year. A high number of notable incidents have involved more experienced paddlers witnessing or needing to rescue new and novice paddlers. A few of these in particular related to incidents in which members of the public had found themselves stuck on weirs. A number involved collisions between paddlers and rowers or issues between paddlers and powered boats.

Injuries requiring a visit to A&E were the second most common type of incident reported. These were often related to shoulder injuries or situations where the individual had hit their head and required a check for concussion. A more significant case involved an individual breaking their ribs and suffering lacerations to internal organs after hitting a rock while kayaking down a rapid. Another case involved an individual inflating their Stand-Up Paddleboard when the valve flew out and broke their eye socket.

It is worth noting also that there has been an increase in the number of incidents requiring the emergency services or third-party callouts. Several incidents involved medical conditions; however, these conditions have often occurred later on land as opposed to on the water.

The following data illustrates the incident information submitted directly to British Canoeing through the incident report system. The fatality figures are obtained through various reporting systems.

Table 1. Incident Rates Against UK Paddlesport Participation Growth

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Participation Figures*	2,100	2,340	4,290	7,980	8,320	8,000**
Fatalities	5	2	6	7	7	7
Fatalities Per Million Participation	2.38	0.85	1.39	1.39*** 0.87	0.91	0.87

*Source: [British Marine Water Sports Survey 2022](#).

** An estimated full year figure based on the [British Marine Water Sports Survey 2022](#).

*** 1.38 including four fatalities at Haverfordwest, 0.87 excluding these.

Figure 1. Trend graph, Incident rates against UK paddlesport participation growth

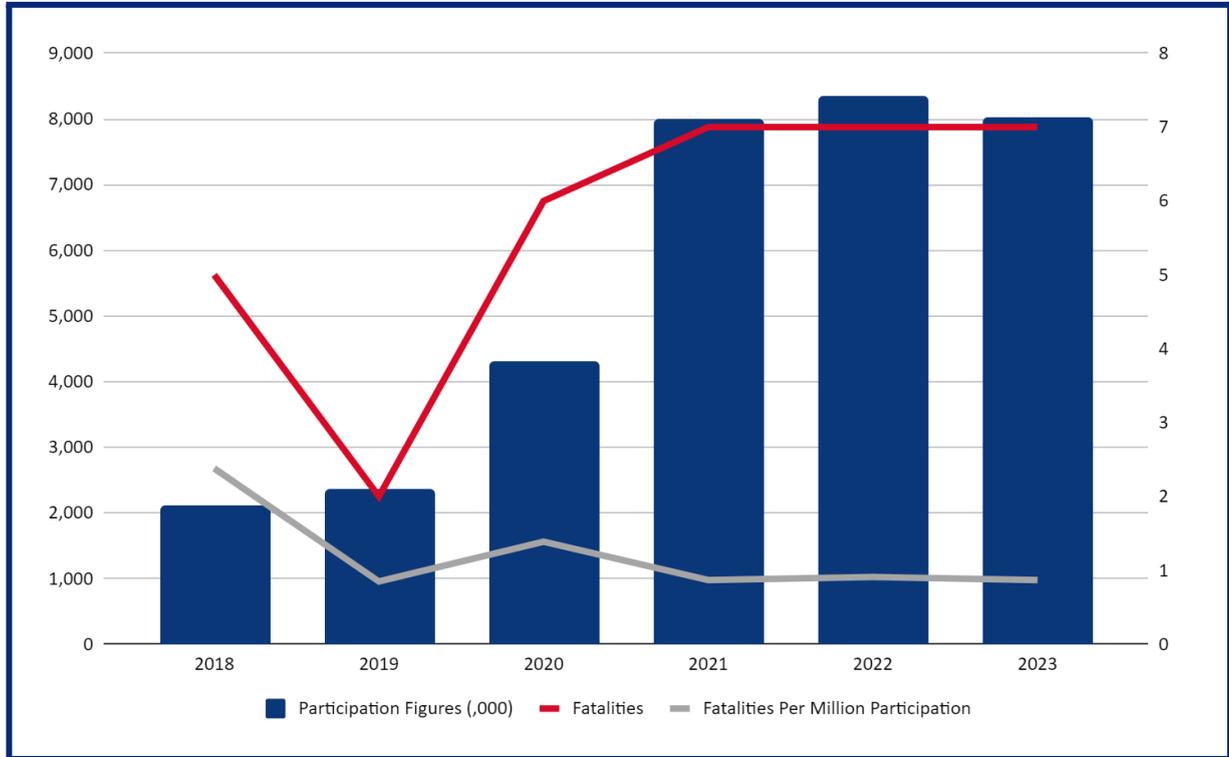
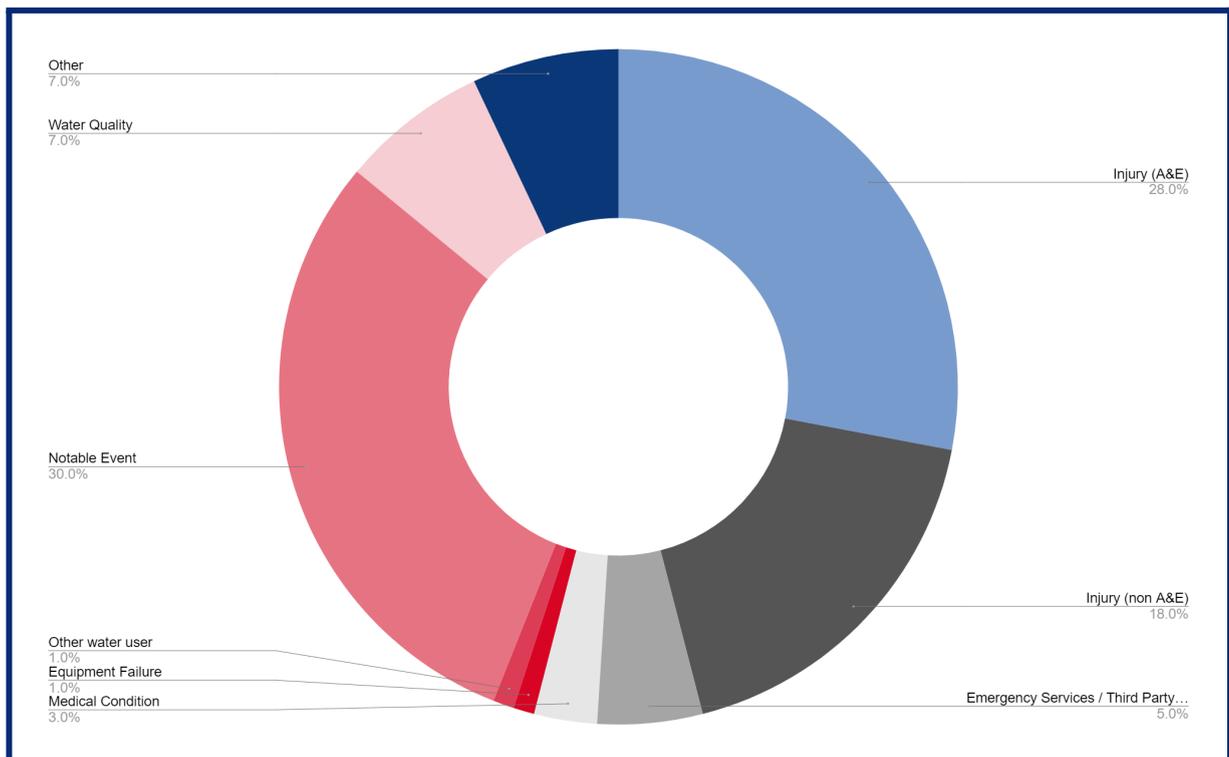


Figure 2. Summary of Classification of 2023 Reported Incidents



National Associations Update

Each of the National Associations have also carried out a range of safety work over the past year:



Canoe Wales

The last 12 months have been a busy period for Canoe Wales. Following the review of the governance of Stand-up Paddleboarding (SUP), Canoe Wales have employed a new SUP Lead for Wales and have been working with the other national associations to develop a comprehensive strategy for the development of SUP in Wales. This includes work around safety messaging, governance and training standards. We have been involved in British Canoeing's Summer Safety campaign and we were heavily involved in the recent Safety Conference, presenting on SUP and were involved in some of the SUP leash research – some of which took place at the National White-Water Centre, Canolfan Tryweryn. We are about to launch our new strategy which is currently out for final consultation and where safety is included as a key priority. We look forward to further progressing this important area through 2024 and working closely with the other national associations in doing this.

Alistair Dickson, Chief Executive Officer, Canoe Wales

Scottish Canoe Association (SCA)



It has been another busy year for focused work on safety in Scotland and we have continued to divide our time equally across sea and inland and generally across disciplines. Most notably the SCA ran the inaugural Student Paddlesports Safety and Leadership Weekend, in partnership with SportScotland at Glenmore Lodge. This event attracted over 30 participants from 9 of the 11 SCA affiliate university paddlesports clubs and candidates were given opportunities to discuss best practice as well as spend time on the river and on the sea with safety and leadership providers. The success of this event has enabled us to make this an annual event, help in the first semester of university and we hope will pave the way for both safe practice and qualifications within the university population.

Work has also continued with Water Safety Scotland and as well as producing safety messages for Kayak, Canoe, Sup & the purchase of second hand equipment, we have led the way in producing a series of short videos, which highlight key safety messages and puts into context the importance of these messages. These videos will be released in May of 2024 as part of a concomitant and targeted campaign.

A case study of some of the work that providers have been busy with in Scotland could be the work in South Ayrshire and delivery of the new SUP safer course. The SCA has worked closely with RNLI, The Outdoor Partnership and delivery partner Adventure Paddle Co. on a campaign to deliver SUP safer courses, free at the point of contact. Over the course of the summer over 90 people participated in this course in the south west and has led to a substantial decrease in coastal-based rescues, particularly in areas where offshore winds cause the greatest risk to novice paddlers.

SCA staff have also continued to support members when incidents or accidents occur and have offered advice and assistance with clubs to support and liaise with third parties, namely Scottish Canals, SSE and HM Coastguard. SCA Staff have also been involved with the formation of an Ocean Racing Working Group and have fed into the first draft of a "Code of Conduct" for the emerging discipline of Ocean Ski Racing.

Calum McNicol, Development Officer, Scottish Canoe Association



The Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI)

CANI continued to promote safe paddling for all through continued collaboration with water safety organisations such as RNLI, Coastguard Northern Ireland and the British Canoeing Safety Advisory Panel. Through our website, social media channels and newsletters to clubs and members we highlighted and shared safety messaging on key areas around offshore winds, correct equipment and clothing, awareness and risks associated with conditions and the importance of always having a method of calling for help if required.

CANI worked in partnership with SportNI and Tollymore National Outdoor Centre to deliver the **“Get Wet Stay Safe”** programme for a second year. The programme provided a series of training sessions across Northern Ireland on the impacts of cold water and safety messaging for novice SUP and Sit on Top users.

Our new strategic plan reinforces CANI’s commitment to safety as a critical aspect of our operations going forward, we will continue to promote safe paddling and through the provision of resources, incident reporting processes, safety advisory panels, recognition programs, and specialised training courses for all levels of paddler.

Rodger Hamilton, Head of Operations, Canoe Association of Northern Ireland

Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)



With more people taking to the water, the RNLI has continued to see an increase in lifeboat and lifeguard responses to paddlesport incidents as a large quantity of casualties are being swept offshore. RNLI water safety volunteers have shared key messages at local events and shows, while RNLI social media posts and real-life rescue stories have been used to increase water safety awareness nationally. The Paddle Safety campaign with British Canoeing was a focal point during the summer months with social media posts and a joint PR day resulting in over 900 pieces of media coverage. Working with industry leaders has been a key area of work for the RNLI as we strive to empower others to keep people safe on the water. The RNLI has worked to improve knowledge and education of key water safety messages which has included presenting at the National Water Safety Conference and the British Canoeing Safety Conference.

Samantha Hughes, National Water Safety Partner, RNLI

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead, working collaboratively on safety with a range of key stakeholders will be one of the main priorities for 2024, enabling consistent safety messaging to be shared with a wider audience of new and novice paddlers. As well as collective messaging, British Canoeing will also review and develop its own safety resources to improve accessibility and support engagement with safety information. Following on from last year's success, British Canoeing working in partnership with the RNLI will also restart the safety campaign to continue to raise awareness of key safety principles. Another main area of focus will be Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP) safety, addressing SUP specific requirements, by commissioning further research projects to gain insight and provide safety advice that is evidence based. Safety remains at the centre of British Canoeing's work throughout the entire organisation.