

## **Paddler Safety Guidance for Ocean Racing and Ocean Race Training**

This safety guidance is one of four documents specifically aimed at supporting paddlers, coaches and event organisers for ocean racing. The four documents are listed below:

- Paddler Safety Guidance for Ocean Racing and Ocean Race Training
- Event Safety for Ocean Race Organisers
- Ocean Race Course Grading
- Group Leader / Coach Safety Guidance for Ocean Racing and Ocean Race Training

### **Overview**

For those new or novice to ocean racing it is recommended to gain both the experience and skills required in such environments under the guidance of an appropriate coach before undertaking the range of competitive events that are available.

For all paddlers training or taking part in an event within an ocean racing setting it is important that safety is paramount and that appropriate equipment is worn and carried, as well as checking the suitability of the environment with your own ability and clear protocols to follow if a mishap occurs.

### **Equipment**

The following list of equipment worn and carried must be appropriate for the ocean racing environment, fitted and operated correctly, in good working order, and checked before use.

- **A Personal Flotation Device (PFD) or Buoyancy Aid**

This must be worn and fitted correctly in line with manufacturers guidance that conforms to EN [ISO 12402-5](#) and rated for the paddlers weight. The PFD / buoyancy aid should be of solid foam construction suitable for racing that provides ease of movement and ventilation.

- **A leash or tether to the craft**

This is to retain contact between the paddler and their craft in the case of any issues. The leash should be at an appropriate length and not drag in the water and must be releasable.

- **A means of communication**

This must be carried and accessible, this can be a mobile phone (with a safety number on fast dial), in a waterproof case or a waterproof VHF radio. Either form of communication should be attached to the paddler's PFD / buoyancy aid. The means of communication chosen should be checked before undertaking a training session or race to ensure appropriate coverage. If mobile coverage is insufficient a VHF is strongly recommended.

- **A whistle**

This is to attract the attention of nearby paddlers, vessels or other water users.

- **A method of location for the emergency services**

This must be attached to the paddler. It might be one of the following items:

- **A Personal Location Beacon (PLB) or other tracking systems**

Although not a form of communication, can be used as a device to notify the emergency services that assistance is required.

Or

- **A flare, either electronic or an in-date hand held orange smoke**

Or

- **A live and activated tracking system**

Either a specific 'personal' system or Safetrx on a phone. During a race this would be a tracker issued by the Race Organiser.

## **Checklist**

Before undertaking any ocean racing training or entering an event it is important that every paddler considers their own ability, the environment and plans appropriately. The following list has been created to act as a checklist for every paddler to go through before getting onto the water:

- Gather and understand local knowledge of the area
- Obtain an accurate weather forecast and tidal information to understand the expected conditions on the water

If the conditions are appropriate and within your paddling ability and experience:

- Make a plan or attend the event / session brief on the plan. If you are being provided with a plan, ensure that you understand it fully and ask questions for any clarity required.
- Make yourself familiar with landmarks and distances on the planned route.
- Have planned and known escape routes to safely get out along the route.
- Have and understand cut off times.
- Inform others of your plan this maybe be a shore contact, crew or support driver including alternative routes, timings and escape points
- Carry out a communications check and that you are wearing and carrying all appropriate equipment.

When on the water either training or during the event, it is important to be vigilant and continually monitor the following:

- Keep an eye on the weather, visibility, and water conditions.
- Take rests and keep hydrated.
- Keep taking transits to confirm your location.
- Make decisions early while you have control and energy to implement.
- Maintain a visual on your paddling partner

If an incident does occur such as a capsize and unable to self-rescue, injury, broken equipment or a getting cold it is important to act early:

- Stay with your craft
- Inform / attract other paddlers on the water
- Conserve energy, stay calm
- Escalate early and inform the event organisers as outlined in the event briefing or if appropriate the emergency services that you need assistance

## Notes

1. It is important that paddlers are prepared not to paddle if the conditions are worse than expected or there is a change to timings, entry or exit points, which give you or others such as your support crew concern.
2. It is highly recommended that when training you paddle with another paddler.
3. It is strongly recommended that paddlers notify the Coastguard of their trip before setting out. This can be done by phoning the National Maritime Operations Centre on 023 9255 2100.
4. Check the weather predictions and wear appropriate clothing. Conditions out at sea change quickly so having a cag to hand is prudent.
5. Wearing a wetsuit long john or lightweight dry suit in the winter months is advisable.