

Event Safety for Ocean Race Organisers

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

This document is to provide advice and guidance to ocean race event organisers, covering the safety of events and appropriate protocols to put in place.

Participants

Due to the nature of ocean racing events and the environments that they take place in, it is important that all participants understand their responsibilities for themselves and the equipment they wear and carry during an event. It is the responsibility of the event organiser to make all participants explicitly aware at various stages of the paddlers responsibilities including at the advertisement, booking, registration and briefing stages.

Paddlers should be expected to have an appropriate level of ability to participate in the event and are confident to paddle in the conditions of the day with the boat and kit they have chosen to use.

Paddlers must be able to remount their craft in the conditions at the event and have a working knowledge and ability to execute self-help and assistance methods.

The Race Organiser of the event retains the right to exclude a paddler who does not display or provide suitable evidence of competency to the minimum level of ability deemed necessary to complete the event safely on the day.

Race organisers should create a culture that ocean racing events are not the place to push a paddlers boundaries. All participants need to be competent and confident that the course and conditions on the day are within their own competency.

Race organisers should consider gaining evidence of participants' previous engagement in events and if appropriate ask for evidence of paddlers competing and finishing in the lower-level grade ocean races if offering higher-grade ocean events.

Safety equipment carried / worn by Competitors:

- PFD (Not waist belt)
- Whistle
- Means of communication (Mobile or VHF)
- Leg Leash
- Tracker (provided by Race Organiser)
- Race Bib / Race number on Craft

Full details of the expectations of the paddlers can be found in the Paddler Safety Guidance document.

Registration

It is recommended that Race Organisers ensure all participants are registered with British Canoeing and / or [Surf Life Saving GB](#) to take part in UK races to ensure appropriate insurance cover.

Craft

Race organisers should ensure all craft taking part in the event have been specifically designed for Ocean Racing events / offshore paddling and should include built-in buoyancy.

The Event

Ocean Race events differ, including navigational requirements and hazards, length, water and weather conditions. The Race Organiser must carry out a specific risk assessment to guide them in taking suitable mitigation measures, including numbers of participants, and type of safety assets.

It is strongly recommended there should be a minimum of three safety assets for an event.

Grading an Event

Within each race grading there are upper and lower levels, depending on conditions, length of course and navigational requirements. The race organiser is strongly advised to make the expected course and conditions clear at the start of the race entry process, so all competitors gain a clear understanding of the level competency that is expected to be able to compete.

Safety Ratios

For a 'entry level' course – there should be a greater amount of safety assets per number of competitors. As the course becomes more advanced and the ability / competency of the competitor increases, there are proportionally less safety assets. It is strongly advised that emphasis is placed in the race entry process that all competitors show evidence they have the required ability to complete the course, so they can enter the event.

Event Officials and Recommended Locations

- Race Organiser / Director (Land based)
- Race Safety Officer (Land based)
- Course Marshal (Control Boat)
- On water Safety Officer (Control Boat or IRB)
- Results officer (Land based)
- Tracker Officer (Land based)

Communication Plan

Race Organisers are responsible for developing and implementing an event communication plan and a dedicated VHF channel for the race, with communication channels to each rescue asset and control boat(s).

Trackers

All ocean events are to have trackers for all competitors and are under the control of the Race Organiser, these can be 'hired' in for the event and come with IT support and software.

Trackers are one part of the safety case, manual systems for both safety and timing should still be maintained and used to give a 'robust' system.

The Race director and the Safety Officer (shore based) are required to have visibility of the trackers. Each rescue asset are required to have visibility of the 'live' trackers

Notes

The GB Ocean Race series uses: Geo Tracks: <https://geotrackslive.com/>

This system has undergone constant development to best support Ocean Racing, to enhance the safety case, provide race timing and promote the event with 'live' tracking.

To engage a race audience, consider access for spectators to follow the race 'live'.

Para Competitors

Some para athletes may require an escort paddler to provide direct support or assistance to the para athletes within the race. This escort paddler should wear a different colour bib and wear and carry the equipment a competitor is required. The escort paddler is not to provide race advantage to the Para Athlete, by navigation or tactical advice or provide a wash.

International / ICF courses

International / ICF courses are Level 3+. All GB Athletes must have competed and been assessed on an Advanced or Elite course.

Starts and Finishes

Race organisers must consider the event conditions, hazards in the start area and availability of space to establish appropriate starts and finishes, the following provides guidance and examples of how starts and finishes can be established:

Starts can be either:

- Beach 'Le Mans' run down to craft, pick up run in.
- Beach, holding onto craft at water's edge, run in.
- SLS 'Jump' start – knee depth, stood on left side of Ski.
- Deep water start – similar to a Canoe Marathon start.

Normal ICF Start is an SLS Jump Start.

Note: For a fair start across the line, where wind and long start lines can distort sound, a race control boat dropping a flag in the front of the start line is the most effective method.

Finishes can be either:

- Deep water – like a Canoe Marathon finish.
- SLS finish – Between the flags, in knee deep water.
- Beach finish – leave the craft on the waters edge, run up the beach.

Normal ICF Finish is the Beach Finish, with a large finish arch 20 to 50m from water's edge.

Note: With the Beach finish Race Organisers need to have a crew of helpers to clear the Craft that has been left at the water's edge, out of the way – especially with any 'surf' present.

Note: On the start line, some craft, and competitors such as Para Athletes or Sea Kayaks will require a 'deep water' start, regardless of the main start format.

- For Grade 1 courses - Once the leader has completed the full lap count the course is closed and those left on the course finish the lap they are on. This way 'novices' are not left on the course for extended times and can return to the finish with the other race competitors – the results will list the number of laps completed per competitor.
- On Grade 2 and Grade 3 courses consideration should be given to a 'slow' and 'fast' starts. So as the race precedes the competitors from the 'Fast' start are catching up with the competitors from the 'Slow' start towards the end of the race bringing the safety assets closure together when competitors are starting to become tired and more likely to have difficulties. As a guide for a 16 km / 10-mile course the time difference between the starts is 10 minutes. .
- Starts for Multi Craft Ocean Racing Events, consideration should be given to separate starts for each type of craft. The concern that SUP competitors could fall onto top of other craft, or the outrigger could hinder / obstruct other craft in a compacted start line. As a general observation the craft move at different speeds, so the SUP competitors should go first, followed by the outriggers, with the Surfski last of the line, this way the competitors are 'catching up' with each other.

Checklist for Race Organisers

- Gain Landowner permissions
- Racecourse design and grading
- Course set-up (including alternative racecourses if feasible)
- Inform Coast Guard / Harbour Authorities / Other water users.
- Incident management plan & Risk assessment
- Race entry process & pre-race briefing information.
- Communications Plan
- Competitors registration & kit check
- Issuing Race Bibs, Boat numbers & Trackers
- Race staff (safety) briefing
- Race brief to competitors
- Marshall line up & number count
- Final Kit & Communications checks
- Starting
- Race Control – during race.
- Finishing
- Collecting Race Bibs & Trackers.
- Confirmation that course is clear.
- Stand down safety and inform Coast Guards that the event is finished.
- Documentation & results
- Wash-up/Review
- Provide a race report to the Ocean Racing committee.