

## **British Canoeing Lifeguards Guidance for Affiliated Clubs**

### **Providing safety kayak/paddler support for organised open water swimming & triathlon activities**

#### **Introduction**

This guidance has been produced by the BC Lifeguards committee as a guide for canoe clubs to use when agreeing to provide safety cover at open water swim or triathlon events and activities. It is designed to outline the key principals and minimum standards required of a BC Lifeguards affiliated club when providing such safety cover.

The requirements within this document match up with the relevant official guidance issued by Triathlon England and the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) for event organisers to comply with. The full guidance documents can be viewed on the respective governing bodies' websites.

#### **Scope**

These guidelines are not designed to provide a 'golden answer' to safety management of open water swimming activities; they are however designed to ensure a reasonable minimum level of provision is made to ensure the safety and well-being of both participants and safety team members.

This document is only looking at areas that directly affect the on-water safety kayak/paddler team. Other areas may also need to be considered based on the location and nature of the activity that are not covered within this document.

#### **Key Principles**

There are a number of key documents and procedures that need to be in place to ensure any open water swimming activity is made as safe as possible. These include having:

- A robust and agreed Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) in place
- An agreed & briefed/rehearsed Emergency Action Plan (EAP)
  - Powered craft support for extraction of casualties (with agreed medical point(s))
- Land based medical/first aid team
- An ability to supervise all swimmers on the course at all times
- An adequate (and agreed) number of appropriately qualified/proficient safety paddlers
- An ability to communicate with the event organiser, water safety team and medical team before & during the event
- Reasonable duty spells and break periods to ensure safety paddlers are able to operate for the duration of the event required
- An understanding of the impact of different weather conditions on the event/activity
- A clear and agreed Go / No Go decision making process on the day of the event
  - Drawn up in advance outlining a key Go / No Go criteria to use on event day
- A formalised Risk Assessment based on what can reasonably be expected to be a risk at the swim venue.

It's important to note that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to safely covering an open water swimming activity. This is because local conditions, swimmer abilities, venues and other practicalities all play a part in the equation. The fundamental part is that all elements of the water safety team, of which the safety kayak team is a part, should be happy with the levels of cover being provided and that they provide an adequate level of supervision of the swim course, meeting the key principles outlined above.

Any concerns should be discussed well in advance of the event to allow time for any additional actions to be taken, if necessary. In order to allow this to happen, it is recommended that the paperwork outlined above is shared with the club, and distributed accordingly in advance of the event, such that any relevant concerns can be aired and dealt with prior to event day.

### **Club's Responsibilities**

- Appoint one individual to act as co-ordinator for the club when dealing with the organiser(s)
- Provide paddlers who are:
  - Skilled and knowledgeable for the environment in which they are operating;
  - Physically fit to undertake their role and able to self-rescue if necessary;
  - Appropriately clothed and equipped, including food and drink, for the prevailing conditions;
  - Able to use their equipment and the equipment available at the facility correctly and safely;
  - Trained/briefed in the safety procedures applicable to their role;
  - Able to communicate for assistance.
- Agree resource levels required, in line with governing body guidelines with the organiser & confirm what the club is able to commit/provide well in advance.
- Keep in touch with the organiser, particularly if recruitment numbers are lower than expected and begin discussing other options that may be feasible prior to the event day.
- Confirm with the organiser in advance they are in agreement with the scoped level of safety resources required for the event/activity.
- Ensure all club members are well briefed prior to the start of the event/activity.

### **Organiser's Responsibilities**

- Provide the club with all relevant information as early as possible
- Ensure a risk assessment is in place to cover the activity. Ensure the club is aware of any elements within the risk assessment for which they are responsible (a copy should be provided).
- Ensure there is a documented Normal Operating Procedure with which the kayak team is in agreement and understands.
- Ensure there is a documented Emergency Action Plan of which all teams are aware and, time permitting, have practiced. This should include the ability to rapidly transport a swimmer back to shore in an emergency.
- Take into account likely / possible weather conditions that may impact on how the swimming activity is able to proceed. Seek input from local water users (e.g. canoe club) to help understand local conditions and how they could be managed.

- Scope the level of safety resources required, in line with governing body guidance (see below) but also seek input from the canoe club and other elements of the water safety team to obtain agreement on the resource levels.

Where multiple clubs are supporting and providing safety paddlers for the same activity or event, an additional responsibility of the organisers is to ensure all clubs are aware of the arrangements in place, including, but not limited to the NOP & EAP. It is recommended that one individual is appointed to take overall responsibility for the safety kayak team and its operations by the organiser to ensure there is a clear command chain before and during the event.

***Safety Cover Levels and Positioning (Joint ASA & Triathlon England (TE) Guidance, 2014)***

*For each swim the safety cover should be organised, resourced and competent to provide effective supervision in the prevailing conditions. When assessing the level and positioning of safety cover some key questions should be considered:*

- *How will we know if a swimmer gets into difficulty at any point on the course?*
- *How will we ensure that swimmers all follow the correct course?*
- *If anyone gets into difficulty how can we provide support quickly to prevent the situation from worsening?*
- *If a swimmer sinks can the safety cover get them back to the surface?*
- *If there is a serious incident how will we recover the swimmer(s) to land quickly?*
- *Where and how will a casualty be handed over to the medical team?*
- *If a safety craft is dealing with an incident will there be sufficient cover to maintain appropriately competent cover for the remaining swimmers still in the water?*

*NOTE: If other activities are taking place on the water at the same time as swimming a further question would be:*

- *How will we ensure that other water users are aware that there are swimmers in the water and where they will be swimming?*

*Given the differing types of water and prevailing conditions, applying generic standards to the level of safety cover based on course design, swim distance or ratio of safety units to swimmers is not appropriate. However, one safety unit per 20 swimmers and swimmers being no more than 50 metres from safety cover provides an initial basis for identifying cover levels and positioning before considering other factors which may indicate a need to potentially increase or decrease those levels.*

The above extract from the joint ASA/TE guidance from 2014 can be used as a starting point to help establish the level of safety resources that shall be required to safely cover the event/activity.

The British Long Distance Swimming Association guidance to canoe escorts can also be found here: <http://www.bldsa.org.uk/pages/1ebldsacanoeescort.htm>

Please note that by their very nature BLD SA events (and similar longer distance swims) that require one-to-one canoe/kayak escort support should be considered very differently to more contained open water swimming or triathlon events/activities. Safety paddlers must be aware of the increased responsibility upon them where they are providing one-to-one escort support over a longer distance and be conscious of the time they may be required to be operational for; potentially without support or relief.

This guidance document does not look to encompass longer distance swimming activities where one-to-one escort support is provided; however a number of the principles outlined above should be considered.

## Canoe Club Pre-Event Checklist

Event name	
Event date	
Event organiser	
Single point of contact	
Contact details	

Club	
Club single point of contact	
Contact details	

NOP seen and agreed	Yes / No
EAP seen and agreed	Yes / No

RA seen and agreed	Yes / No
Clubs RA produced	Yes / No

Numbers competitors	
Number safety cover required	
Number safety cover supplied	

First aid supplier	
First aid contact (event day)	
First aid landing point	

Weather forecast/expected	
Weather on the day	

Go / No Go Criteria	
<b>Go / No Go?</b>	