

# Dragon Boat Safety Rules & Guidelines for Emergency Situations

## INTRODUCTION

The Dragon Boat programs of Three Rivers Rowing Association will follow the Three Rivers Rowing Association (TRRA) Safety Rules as the overriding safety document. A copy of this document is on the TRRA website [www.threeriversrowing.org](http://www.threeriversrowing.org).

Rules and practices included in this document are specific to a dragon boat, and the equipment used with a dragon boat. These rules and practices are outlined below to augment practices not covered specifically in the TRRA Safety Rules. Some of these augmentations, where appropriate, were extracted from the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) *"Safety Procedures for Event Organizer."*

## SECTION 1 SAFETY RULES

### 1.1 Helm (Steersperson)

- Before leaving the boat house area the Helm must confirm that each person aboard has a PFD, that the boat has bailers, there is a cell phone aboard, and that the TRRA log is filled out. If a novice Helm will be steering, the Supervisory Helm will announce this to the crew members.
- The Helm has responsibility for the safety of the boat when on the water and overrides any commands from the drummer or paddlers in the boat. Should an emergency situation occur, the Supervising Helm may take over control from a novice Helm, depending on the experience level of the novice Helm. This will occur after the boat is stopped and it will be announced to the crew.
- While at the dock, the Helm will instruct the paddlers to use the "Buddy-Buddy" system. The first buddy group (two persons, usually bench mates,) forms a threesome with the drummer, the last buddy group, a threesome with the Helm. If a person is without a bench mate; then form a buddy group with the bench in front or behind. The crew shall then count out their Buddy number. The Helm will then repeat his/her number to the boat so that all know the total number aboard.

## SECTION 2 SAFETY PRACTICES

### 2.1 Dragon Boat SWAMPED ( this will augment TRRA Safety Guidelines )

A boat is swamped when it takes on large amounts of water which fills the Boat to a level where it becomes unstable.

A swamped boat will float upright just below the surface of the water or if not totally swamped, the gunwales will be just above the water level. Swamping generally occurs in high winds or in choppy wave conditions.

While the crew may be tempted to 'abandon ship' as it fills up with water, it is best that the crew members stay in the boat and every person aboard don their PFD and to remain still, calm, and quiet so they can hear directions from the Helm, who will conduct a crew check for the condition of the crew such as fright and cold.

If a safe docking area is nearby, and conditions permit, the boat can be slowly paddled to that area.

If water can be quickly and safely bailed out, the Helm assigns crew members to do this with the bailer(s) in the boat. Other members can assist by using their paddles to bail out the boat.

If the boat cannot be bailed out, the crew stays in the boat to steady it - all paddlers reach with their paddles as far to the outside of the boat as possible and hold them flat on the water, e.g. "PADDLES ON THE WATER". Upon their arrival, rescue boat personnel will take control of the situation.

**RECOVERY** - The rescue boat should approach the swamped dragon boat slowly on the leeward side (away from where the wind is coming) of the dragon boat, preferably from the stern, and remain at the stern of the dragon boat. Since the rescue boats may not have a propeller guard, it is important to keep the bow of the rescue boat near the stern of the dragon boat and away from the paddlers.

If the dragon boat can be safely maneuvered, the Helm instructs the crew to slowly move the dragon boat to the nearest suitable unloading area.

If this is not possible or there are no rescue boats immediately available and if the weather conditions permit, some of the crew may swim to shore in a self rescue, under the direction of the Helm. Generally speaking, the boat should not be abandoned unless safety becomes the overriding factor.

## **2.2 Self Rescue – Swimming to shore ( this will augment TRRA Safety Guidelines)**

Crew members may swim to shore only if directed to do so by the Helm. All crew members swim to the same spot on shore as directed by the Helm. Anyone attempting to swim to shore must be wearing a PFD.

Crew members are to swim with their 'buddy'. Cold water can make a short distance feel like a long one. If a buddy was taken into a rescue boat, the lone buddy is to make a threesome with a buddy pair.

Once on shore, the Helm conducts a crew check accounting for both the presence and condition of those taken aboard a rescue boat or who may have remained with the dragon boat to help bring it to shore.

The Helm reports to the rescue boat anyone missing or injured.

## **2.3 Dragon Boat CAPSIZED ( this will augment TRRA Safety Guidelines)**

A capsized boat is one that has turned upside down with the hull of the boat uppermost. Capsizing can occur in strong side winds or in cross wave conditions. When in these conditions, crews should be alerted to "BRACING THE BOAT". This procedure involves the paddlers on the low side of the boat as it begins a roll, to vigorously push down in the water with their paddles to stop the roll. "BRACING THE BOAT" must be done as a response by the paddlers to an abnormal roll, rather than as a response to a command from the helm. Bracing can mitigate the roll, but crews should understand that they cannot stop a boat from capsizing once it has passed the stability point of the roll.

The crew members must then let themselves go with the roll of the boat and try to throw themselves clear of the boat or dive into the water. Once clear of the boat, crew members should try to locate and retain the nearest paddles and PFDs and provide assistance for others in the water. Every crew member

should don their PFD if not already on. Remember, the "T" handle grip can be a hook with another paddle.

A crew member who is underneath the overturned boat can breathe in the air pocket. The member should then grasp the gunwale of the boat with one hand and push back down into the water until they are clear of the boat and can surface.

- **Establish the person in command** – This should be the Helm or a Supervising Helm when the situation dictates.
- **Determine if anyone is missing or injured**- As soon as each crew member is clear of the boat they must look for their Buddy. The Helm will check that all crew members are present by calling for members to identify themselves by shouting out their Buddy number. Once all the crew is accounted for 'Buddies' shall check each other for injury and report any injuries to the Helm. Stay with the boat.
- **Find the missing person(s)** – this must be done quickly as time may be a life or death factor.
- **Check if anyone is under the dragon boat whether or not the count is confirmed** –
  - If paddlers are alongside the boat on both sides; they should reach under with their arms to feel if a person is underneath the boat. Alternately, the pair at the bow should reach underneath to the person on the opposite side of the boat using a paddle and traverse the length of the boat holding the paddle to establish that no one is underneath.
  - At the same time, the Helm shall have someone, submerge and come up in the air pocket under the boat and visibly confirm that no one is under the boat. The boat is compartmentalized, so while underneath look or feel into each compartment. The bottom of the boat is translucent, and visibility will be possible in daylight.
  - If someone is under the boat, and unconscious, the Helm shall designate the person(s) to submerge under the water and into the air pocket and pull the person under the gunwale of the boat and bring him/her to the surface and begin First Aid and call 911. The PFD of the trapped person(s) will be removed only if absolutely necessary. CPR is not recommended in the water. Rescue Breaths can be given if a pulse is present, and more easily if the person is wearing a PFD. If necessary, position the person over the capsized hull with their head lowered, clear their air-way and begin pressing at their lower back behind the bottom of their rib cage to expel the water.
  - If the person is conscious, calm them down, have them grasp the gunwale of the boat with one hand and push back down into the water until they are clear of the boat and can surface.
- **Determine the extent of the missing or injuries** -. Call River patrol or the TRRA boathouse or signal a nearby launch as the situation dictates.

*(Below items 1, 2 and 3 are from the TRRA Safety Guidelines and are included here for clarity)*

**1 DIAL 911, or CHANNEL 16** (Marine Radio)

**2 You will be asked, "What is your emergency?"**

You should report the nature of the accident. For example, "There has been a boating accident and there are rowers in the water"

You may be asked:

- your location (name of river, landmarks)?
- how many people are involved and is anybody missing?
- age and gender of people?
- are victims conscious or unconscious
- are victims breathing or not breathing
- is CPR being performed
- is CPR required
- time of incident
- how many boats are involved?
- the name of a contact person and the contact information?
- will there be someone to meet the paramedics?

If you are at the boathouse or on shore then a land based crew will be sent.

If you are in the middle of the river and need to have rescue sent by water, you need to request this. An EMS supervisor will make the decision

- 3 The telephone at Three Rivers Rowing Washington's Landing Lambert Boathouse office telephone number is 412 231- 8772.

- **Gather paddles, PFD's and other equipment from the boat that are in the river –**
- **Upright the Boat** – If conditions permit, upright the capsized boat using the “Flip Line” attached to bench 5 (if present). The boat will be about ¾ filled with water and can be paddled to shore and/or bailed as a swamped boat.
- Follow the **Recovery** in **section 2.1 Swamped Boat** and **Self Rescue section 2.3** as appropriate.
- **Get the dragon boat towed to the shore or dock** – If the boat was not up-righted in the river and was towed ashore, upright the boat; then bail.
- **File Incident Report with TRRA Linked here: [Incident Report Form](#)**

## APPENDICES

- A. **PFD REQUIRED LIST** – There shall be a list of the persons who have not passed the TRRA Swimming test with a special note of the non-swimmers and weak swimmers. This will be included as part of the team roster.
- B. **EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LIST**- There shall be a list of the persons with medical background, first aid, CPR or life guard certification and determine a protocol for their usage. This will be included as part of the team roster.
- C. **HELM** – There shall be a list of Helm and novice Helm. This will be included as part of the team roster.