



# Safety Protocol

updated April 10, 2026

## Safety Procedures – General

- a) Each person must always wear a Canadian-approved Personal Floatation Device (PFD) while in a dragon boat.
- b) Each person is assigned a seat before loading into a dragon boat.
- c) Paddlers are responsible to know where their seat partner is and their condition – the “buddy system”.
- d) While in the dragon boat, paddlers must be seated unless asked to switch seats by the steersperson or coach/ caller.
- e) Paddlers are expected to listen and obey the steersperson’s commands. The steersperson is always in command regardless of who is leading the practice or the race.
- f) Prior to leaving the boat launch, a backup steersperson will be identified to take over for the steersperson if necessary.
- g) Each person should keep a set of dry clothes and a towel in their vehicle or inside the KIDS shed.

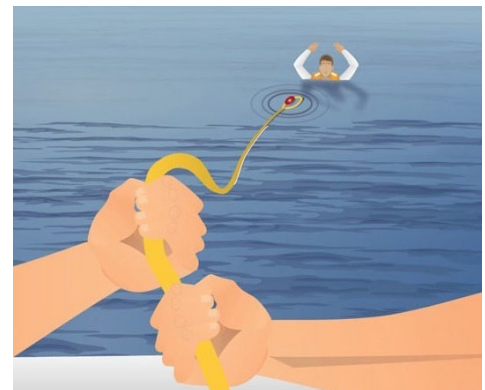
## Safety Equipment

Before leaving the boat compound, it is the steersperson’s responsibility to ensure that the dragon boat is fully functional and water-worthy, and that this safety equipment is in the boat:

- 1) First aid kit in waterproof container and attached to the boat
- 2) Throw bag attached to the boat
- 3) At least 2 boat bailers
- 4) Cell phone in waterproof container
- 5) Sound signaling device, e.g. whistle, air horn
- 6) Spare paddle for the steersperson, in case the steering oar gets lost or damaged

## How to Use a Throw Bag

A throw bag filled with rope is used as a common water rescue tool. KIDS throw bags are red in color and each bag contains a long yellow rope. The throw bag may be used during a person overboard situation.



If the steersperson (or coach/ caller) designates you to toss a throw bag to the person overboard,

- 1) Stand up and ensure that you have a safe and secure footing in the boat.

Make sure the rope end of the throw bag is firmly attached to the boat. Grasp the bag firmly with your throwing hand.

- 2) Pull about 3 meters of “tail” on from the end inside the boat so you can let out some rope if needed.
- 3) Yell “ROPE” to attract the attention of the person in the water and try to make eye contact with them.
  - 4) Depending on your ability and training, use an underhand or an overhand grip to throw the bag **over and past** the person’s head. They should grab the rope (not the bag). If they grab the bag, more rope may spool out and the person may go downstream further than necessary.
  - 5) As you throw the bag, the rope will unravel from the bag. It is VERY IMPORTANT that you don’t let go of the loose end in your non-throwing hand. That loose end is what you must use to pull the person in.
  - 6) If your throw is short, ask the person to swim to the bag if possible. It’s unlikely that you’ll have time to coil the rope for a second throw.
  - 7) Ask the person in the water to hold the rope over their shoulder while floating on their back with their feet pointed away from the boat.
- 8) If needed, have another crew member help you pull on the rope to pull the person toward the boat.
- 9) See the “Person Overboard” section on how to pull the person into the boat.
  - 10) After the throw bag and rope have dried, make sure to repack the throw bag properly to prevent a knotted mess and ensure easy unraveling for future use.

## Safety Procedure – Person Overboard



If someone in the dragon boat falls into the water, immediately call out loudly “Person overboard.” This communicates the situation to the entire crew.

- 1) The steersperson (or coach/ caller) takes command and calls “hold the boat”. Then “brace” or “stabilize” may be called and is maintained by all paddlers until a new command is called.
- 2) The steersperson (or coach/ caller) assigns a timekeeper to track how long the person is in the water and to watch them.
- 3) The steersperson (or coach/ caller) calls out to the person overboard to check for alertness and responsiveness.
- 4) If there is no current and the person is close to the boat, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) will have the closest paddler in the boat reach out by extending their paddle with the T-grip towards the person in the water.
- 5) If the person is drifting away, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) will designate a paddler to toss the throw bag to the person overboard. This connects the boat with the person to prevent further drifting, especially if there is a strong current. See “How to Use a Throw Bag” section for instructions.
- 6) Once the person has a good grip on the paddle or rope, designated paddlers pull the person towards the boat. If possible, try to pull the person onto the boat at the bow/ front or at the stern/ back without leaning outwards.
- 7) Ensure their PFD is snug. Hold on to their PFD shoulder straps. If needed, ask other paddlers to hold on to the puller’s waist or legs for extra leverage and stability.
- 8) If the person overboard is okay with this, make use of their PFD’s buoyancy by bouncing the person up and down a few times before pulling them up into the boat.

- 9) Either a back or a front pull can be used. A front pull will allow the person to grab onto the gunnel while being pulled into the boat. A back pull may be preferable if the person has no energy left.
- 10) The steersperson (or coach/ caller) may ask paddlers on the opposite side to maintain “brace” and lean out to balance the boat and compensate for the weight shift.
- 11) If it is difficult to pull the person into the boat, get them out of the water as much as possible and hold them while the rest of the crew paddles to the closest safe shore where they can board.
- 12) This entire rescue must be completed within 10 minutes or less to reduce the risk of hypothermia. The timekeeper/ watcher needs to let the steersperson (or coach/ caller) know every 3 minutes on how much time has elapsed.
- 13) Once the person is out of the water, give them first aid treatment for hypothermia.

### **Safety Procedure – Dragon Boat Swamps**

A dragon boat is swamped when it takes on a large amount of water and becomes unstable. It will float upright just below the surface of the water. In the event of a dragon boat swamping,

- 1) Stay in the boat and remain calm and quiet so you can hear commands from the steersperson (or coach/ caller).
- 2) The steersperson (or coach/ caller) accounts for all the crew by calling out seat numbers and noting the response, or if this not possible, doing a head count.
- 3) If water can be quickly and safely bailed out, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) will assign paddlers to do this with the bailers in the boat. Some paddlers may be assigned to use their paddles to bail out the boat. Other paddlers may be assigned to “brace” or “stabilize” the boat.
- 4) After enough water is bailed out so that the boat is more stable, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) will call for slow paddling towards the nearest safe shore. Then the remaining water can be bailed out of the boat.

### **Safety Procedure – Dragon Boat Capsizes**

While dragon boats, like any other boat, can flip, this is rare. If a dragon boat capsizes (turns over upside down),

- 1) Clear yourself from the seat and away from the boat. Let the dragon boat roll over and let equipment float away. If the water is cold, “tuck up” (pull your knees to your chest and wrap your arms around your legs) and remain still to conserve body heat. Stay calm and quiet.
- 2) Listen to the steersperson (or coach/ caller). They will tell you what to do.
- 3) Hold on to the side of the boat. Stay with the boat and leave it in its capsized position. Use it as a floating platform with the crew evenly spaced around the boat.
- 4) Look for your seat partner and check that they’re okay. If they’re injured, grasp the gunwale of the boat with one hand, then grab the upper part of your partner’s PFD or clothing and hold on to them.
- 5) The steersperson (or coach/ caller) accounts for all of the crew by calling out seat numbers and noting the response, or if this is not possible, doing a head count.
- 6) If someone is missing, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) may ask one or several paddlers to feel under the boat, within their immediate proximity, to see if the missing person is underneath. There is always an air pocket inside a capsized boat.
- 7) If anyone is missing or seriously injured, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) will contact emergency services.
- 8) Under the instructions of the steersperson (or coach/ caller), a capsized dragon boat may be rolled back to the upturned/ swamped position and used for support by holding onto the gunwales.
- 9) In a race situation, await the arrival of the safety motorboat. Then any injured people should be loaded onto the safety boat and given first aid.
- 10) If practical, the steersperson (or coach/ caller) will direct the crew to “swim” the dragon boat to shore. If not practical, the safety boat will load the crew (in shifts if necessary) and take them to shore.
- 11) Swimming/ pushing/ floating the dragon boat to the nearest safe shore is done only under the control of the steersperson (or coach/ caller) and when the swimmers are capable and not at risk.
- 12) If conditions are not suitable for “swimming” the dragon boat, then the crew may leave the boat and swim to shore in pairs using the buddy system, under the control of the steersperson (or coach/ caller).
- 13) After the crew is safe, a safety boat may be used to recover the dragon boat and equipment.