



Safety & Risk Management Policy

Updated: May 1, 2019

This policy applies to Whitewater Ontario (“W/O”) members and clubs conducting on-water activities. It is intended to alert event organizers and participants of important safety practices to minimize and manage the risk of accidents.

The procedures outlined in Part 1 must be followed at all W/O sanctioned events/trips and all W/O sanctioned club events/trips. Failure to follow the procedures could result in the insurance company rejecting a coverage claim.

The procedures outlined in Part 2 are recommended for W/O sanctioned events/trips and should be applied as appropriate according to the judgment of Event/Trip Leaders (“Leaders” or “Guides”).

Part A: Mandatory Safety Practices

1) When on open water, every paddler must:

- a) Wear a lifejacket or personal floatation device (PFD).
- b) While on moving water Class 3 or higher, wear a helmet of appropriate size.
- c) Carry a sound signaling device (pea-less whistle or air horn).

- d) Carry a buoyant heaving line (throw bag) at least 15 meters (50 feet) long.
- e) Carry a bailing device or manual bilge pump (water bottles, sponges, or non-vented helmets qualify as bailing devices).
- f) Carry a watertight flashlight or navigation lights (between sundown & sunrise).
- g) Carry a magnetic compass if watercraft is navigating out of sight of navigation markers.
- h) In cold water (less than 15°C), wear appropriate wetsuits or drysuits.
- i) Ensure all items carried in the watercraft are securely stowed and will not interfere with the participants ability to safely paddle or exit the boat.
- j) Have equipment that is safe, appropriate for the paddler and the current weather & water conditions.

2) Trip Leaders, or a designate in the group, must:

- a) Have a waterproof first aid kit on the river that meets the requirements of the Small Vessel Regulations (SOR/2010-91) Paragraph 8.
- b) On any excursion on cold-water (less than 15°C), have an appropriate plan and/or equipment to rewarm any participant. These could include:
 - i) Ensuring all participants wear appropriate wetsuits or drysuits
 - ii) Carrying extra dry-clothing in a waterproof container
 - iii) Carrying fire-making materials & a portable shelter (emergency blanket)
 - iv) Staying close to an accessible heated building
- c) Perform a safety-briefing to all participants before the start including (but not limited to):
 - i) Safe paddling practices
 - ii) Basic rescue procedures
 - iii) Location of First-Aid Kit(s) and Emergency Gear
 - iv) Local & Weather Hazards
 - v) Paddling Signals
 - vi) Time for questions

Some, or all, of the Safety Briefing sections may not be required when all of the participants are known by the Trip-Leader to be familiar with the information.

- d) Leave a float-plan with a responsible person who can share the information with the authorities in the event the group does not check-in on time including (but not limited to):
 - i) Names of all participants
 - ii) Participants & Leaders skill levels
 - iii) Description of boats and other equipment
 - iv) Description of other vehicles
 - v) Put-in & take-out locations
 - vi) Time of departure & expected return

When not possible to provide a full float plan, the information shall be left in a location on shore known to the responsible person, that is accessible to search & rescue authorities. Websites & other on-line resources may be used to fulfill these requirements.

These requirements listed under Section 1 & 2 are required according to Transport Canada, Small Vessel Regulations (SOR/2010-91). These items are not deemed mandatory for Paddling/Rolling training activities undertaken in a Pool, whereby Certified, On-Duty, Lifeguards are present. Unless the activities undertaken present an increased level of risk/injury, e.g. Kayak Polo, for which the appropriate level of PPE shall be assessed by the Trip Leader.

3) River trips shall adhere to the following guidelines

- a) River trips shall be conducted with no less than 3 paddlers. For river trips in areas considered to be remote or isolated (>1 hour required to contact Emergency Services), river trips shall be conducted with no less than 4 paddlers.
- b) The ratio of Novice-Participants (participants who would be considered to require coaching and/or instruction on a given river trip) to Trip Leaders shall not exceed 6:1 (non-W/O members shall not count towards this number)

4) Trip Leaders shall adhere to the requirements laid out in the “Trip Leaders Roles and Responsibilities”

- 5) Rivers / Rapids shall be free and clear of any known Ice-Shelves, Strainers, or any other abnormal/adverse hazards which present a direct hazard to paddlers to be considered Sanctioned.
- 6) Rivers / Rapids which are considered to be Class 5 or higher cannot be sanctioned and shall be excluded from the scope of sanctioning for any River Trip or Event.

Part B: Recommended Safety Practices

1) It is recommended that all paddlers:

- a) Be able to swim with a life jacket and be familiar with safe practices when swimming in rapids (e.g. feet first, do not attempt to stand due to risk of entrapment or river obstacles).
- b) Have flotation devices in their boat.
- c) Bring an appropriate means of re-hydration while on the river.

2) It is recommended that Trip Leaders, or designates in the group:

- a) Wear a safety boat harness tow system when running a river.
- b) Have at least one Leader or participant experienced in First Aid and Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).
- c) Have at least one Leader or participant experienced in swift water rescue techniques.

3) It is strongly recommended that a Trip Leader, or designate in the group, while paddling in a Remote or Isolated location (> 1 hr required to contact Emergency Services):

- a) Carry a Pin-Kit (Z-Drag) and be competent in its use.
- b) Carry a Spare Paddle.
- c) Carry a Survival Kit for a potential long-term (Overnight) stay in the wild.
- d) Carry a satellite SOS beacon.