



Elmbridge Canoe Club

River safety - Our expectations

Rev 2.0 June 2024

Although near misses and collisions are rare on our stretch of river, we have put the following guidance in place to help us manage the safety of our club activities alongside other river users.

This guidance applies to all Elmbridge canoe club members and includes coached sessions and adult social paddling. This has been developed to aid individual decision making as we look to develop intelligent racing athletes.

This document supports the club operational risk assessment and will be reviewed periodically by the Safety officer, Club coaches and committee.

Our 10 Navigational rules

1. Given our kayaks are highly maneuverable and that we are typically looking forward, it is expected that we will get out of the way of other river users whenever practical. We are more exposed than rowers and any collision risks damage to equipment or potential injury.
2. All club members should be aware of the Thames navigational rules. Other river users will expect us to paddle on the right of the river.
3. There are times when the nature of our sport (including specific safety considerations) mean we cross over and paddle on the left hand side. This can be handled safely if we follow some basic guidance. When paddling on the left side of the river it is important that:
 - **ALL** paddlers have a heightened awareness of other river users.
 - It is **always** your responsibility to avoid a collision by moving out of the way of oncoming river traffic. Do not shout at others and expect them to move - they are following the river rules.
 - Group members or coaches must notify other paddlers in the group of oncoming river traffic to make sure they are aware.
 - Coaches should position themselves to view oncoming river traffic. This is particularly important for blind bends.
 - Paddlers should not cut the blind left hand corner when approaching Walton bridge from upstream purely to use the racing line. This is a high risk area on our river section during busy periods.
4. An important aspect of our sport is the start of efforts. When lining up across the river it is important to be aware of other river users and make sure we do not get in their way. It is the responsibility of the coaches and paddlers to make all reasonable efforts to prevent us from impacting other river users.

5. Individuals will need to make their own decisions on how to overtake or pass other river users. This will depend on river conditions and other river traffic. Here is some guidance to consider:
 - Rowers and other river users will be expecting to be passed on the right when approaching head on, or up the middle of the river when approaching from behind.
 - When passing rowers it may be safer to pass on the inside by the bank as this avoids the risk of blade collisions especially when the river is busy with boats traveling in both directions.
 - Please always give other river users space and do not cut in front of other river users. We have a wide river and there is no need to cut close to rowers, SUPs, Swimmers or powered craft. This applies to large wash groups which can be intimidating to other river users.
 - Remember that while we can see what is ahead of us, rowers can be caught by surprise when we suddenly pass them head on as they can't see us approaching until very late.
6. Care should be taken when we are resting at the edge of the river after efforts (or paddling with slow groups) as rowers could be approaching from behind and will likely not be looking where they are going. Please move over to the right. If there is a risk of collision or an oncoming rowing boat has not seen the group please shout "ahead" to make them and the group aware.
7. In many of the groups we rely on individual decision making as part of our goal to develop intelligent racing athletes. We recognise individuals don't always make the right call. In cases where learning or feedback is required we expect a coach or senior member of the group to provide immediate verbal feedback / instruction and follow up with the paddler after the effort. This will help us all improve our on water decision making.
8. It is important we recognise other river users. If we come close to other river users or our actions result in them needing to change path or stop you must acknowledge our error and apologize. This applies to everyone. Being courteous to other river users will help us all get along and maintain relationships between the clubs on our section of river.
9. All near misses or incidents should be reported to a coach. This will enable us to monitor near misses and update our club guidance as needed. Any collisions will be reported via the BC incident reporting system.
10. Any member found to be repeatedly ignoring coach guidance or taking excessive risks which impact themselves or other river users may be subject to ECC disciplinary procedures.