

RISK MANAGEMENT

Appendix 8: Paddlesports During the Age of COVID-19

May 22, 2020

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to present a set of suggested paddlecraft practices, based on currently available information. This document presents an example of a risk management approach (adapted from the United States Coast Guard) that may be useful for paddlesports. This approach is provided to assist paddling instructors and event organizers but does not replace guidance from federal (e.g., CDC), state, and local authorities (e.g., health departments). In certain cases, it also may be advisable to check with your health care provider, attorney, insurance representative, and other appropriate experts. Local risk will depend on numerous factors. Individual instructors and event organizers are responsible for appropriate risk assessment and risk management

The STAAR Model is a general framework, used by the United States Coast Guard, to identify, and clarify, potential risk management strategies. It has five components: **S**pread Risk, **T**ransfer Risk, **A**cept Risk, **A**void Risk, and **R**educe Risk. It should be noted that these components are *not* independent of each other and there may be significant overlaps and interrelationships. It should also be noted that other risk management models exist, which may be applicable to paddlesports.

Spread Risk

From the perspective of the Coast Guard, this may mean spreading out risk over time, place, etc. From the perspective of paddlesports, there are various ways by which risk could be spread out. For example, spreading out over time could be achieved by staggering start times for group events (to decrease congregation of large groups of people). As another example, spreading out in space could be achieved by choosing larger, as opposed to smaller, assembly points.

Transfer Risk

From the perspective of the Coast Guard, this may mean selection of appropriate assets. For example, if a rescue needs to be conducted in deteriorating ocean conditions, then a small patrol boat may be withdrawn and a more rough-weather ready surf boat may be substituted. From the perspective of paddlesports, there are several ways in which risk could be transferred – for example, by designation of specific rescuers (see **Rescues**).

Accept Risk

Risk assessment is not a one-time event – rather it should be viewed as a continual process. As a result, an initial decision to accept the risk(s) may, based on changing circumstances, need to be revisited –either with a decision to keep accepting the risk(s), or to avoid the risk(s). From the perspective of paddlesports, this has clear applicability as weather and other environment factors change, as group dynamics change (e.g., the ability to maintain awareness, and execution, of social distancing), and so forth.

Avoid Risk

As discussed above, ongoing risk assessment may lead to the decision to no longer accept the risk(s) – i.e., they now need to be avoided. From the perspective of paddlesports, this relates to a question which should always be top of the mind: “should the event be terminated”? As another example, a choice may be made, while underway, to avoid an area that looks more challenging than originally envisioned.

Reduce Risk

Strategies and tactics should be identified and implemented to reduce risk. From the perspective of paddlesports, this should take place prior to an event commencing, and continue throughout the event itself. One example is “preloading” a course to teach as much as possible remotely (e.g., didactic/classroom material can be taught by teleconference, as opposed to in person). Many other examples are presented in the **Paddlesports During the Age of COVID-19: Risk Assessment & Risk Management** document.

NOTE: Although this document is specifically focused on risks related to COVID-19, *all* relevant factors creating risk (e.g., weather, water conditions, etc.) should be continually evaluated.

Although (publicly available) methodologies, used by the Coast Guard, are incorporated into this document, the United States Coast Guard has neither reviewed, nor endorsed, this document.

We make no representation or warranty as to the accuracy of the content of this document. This document is provided for educational, informational and general reference purposes only. It is not intended to serve as legal, medical or other advice and does not substitute for, or replace, advice obtained from your medical providers or legal advisors. We make no representation as to the accuracy or completeness of the information provided or its use in a particular application.