

DragonSports USA Boat Safety Rules & Guidelines

The following Boat Safety Rules are to be followed by all dragon boat teams, outrigger crews and individuals when renting and using DragonSports USA ("DSUSA") boats and equipment:

Rules Applicable to All DSUSA Boats

1. Only individuals that are at least 14 years old, have signed a DSUSA waiver, and are DSUSA members may use DSUSA boats and equipment unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board. In addition, paddlers must be listed on a team/crew roster or have paid open practice fees to use DSUSA boats and equipment. *Exception: New paddlers are permitted three team/crew or open practices after submitting a signed waiver and prior to joining DSUSA.*
 2. Non-paddling passengers are not permitted on DSUSA boats unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board.
 3. Individuals are not permitted to operate or use DSUSA boats while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 4. All practices must be held close to the shore and in permitted areas, as outlined in the "Areas of Operation."
 5. DSUSA boats must not be beached or docked away from the DSUSA slips within the RiverPlace Marina unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board.
 6. Red and green bow lights and a white stern light must be displayed on DSUSA boats used between sunset and sunrise and during any other period of limited visibility. Lights should be bright enough to be visible from at least 100 yards away.
 7. In an emergency, remain with the boat. It is advised that at least one person on the boat carry a mobile phone in a waterproof case for making emergency calls.
- (Concussion Safety)
8. Contact 911, the US Coast Guard or the Multnomah County Sheriff's Department as soon as possible if anyone on a DSUSA boat is injured or possibly has hypothermia as the result of swamping, a capsizing, or other incident. All such incidents must also be reported to the DragonSports Board by email or phone as soon as possible after the end of the practice during which the incident occurred.
 9. To the extent not stated within these rules, state and federal laws and regulations (including, but not limited to, U.S. Coast Guard rules) governing boating and river navigation must be followed.

Rules Applicable to Dragon Boats

1. Individuals must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved, adjusted, and fastened, personal flotation device (PFD) at all times. Inflatable PFDs are not permitted unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board.
2. A non-paddling tiller and caller must be in position during practice.
3. The caller is the captain (and decision-maker) during practice.
4. The caller must review basic safety rules with the paddlers at the beginning of each practice.

5. There must be at least eight experienced paddlers, and no more than twenty-two paddlers, aboard the dragon boat unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board. The eight-paddler minimum applies during fair weather conditions and must be increased as weather and water conditions warrant, as outlined in the "Guidelines For Weather/Currents."
6. Paddlers must notify the caller of any physical conditions that may affect their ability to react or respond in an emergency. A caller may decline to seat paddlers who, in the caller's sole opinion, may not have the ability to perform the duties associated with paddling.
7. The caller and the tiller must be on the lookout for dangerous situations at all times, be aware of river hazards, and avoid hazardous places, as outlined in the "Guidelines For River Hazards."
8. If paddlers are changing positions on the boat during a practice, all other paddlers must obey the "brace the boat" command from the caller or tiller.
9. One extra paddle and PFD should be carried on board during practice.

Rules Applicable to Outrigger Canoes

1. Individuals must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved, adjusted, and fastened, personal flotation device (PFD) at all times unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board. It is recommended that all individuals wear PFDs year-round; however, when the river water temperature exceeds 60 degrees Fahrenheit (15.6 degrees Celsius), as reported by the USGS Willamette River Gauge at the Morrison Bridge, and at the discretion of the steersperson, paddlers may choose not to wear a PFD at their own risk. There must be a PFD on board for each paddler, regardless of whether or not it is worn. The DSUSA Board will notify all DSUSA-certified steerspersons when the water temperature exceeds 60 degrees and PFDs are optional (otherwise, they are required).
2. Only DSUSA-certified steerspersons are allowed to steer DSUSA canoes.
3. The steersperson is the captain (and decision-maker) during practice.
4. The steersperson must carry the DSUSA-provided safety kit at all times while on the water.
5. The steersperson must review capsize (huli) recovery procedures and basic safety rules with the crew before launching the canoe at each practice.
6. In addition to the steersperson, there must be at least four paddlers (three with prior paddling experience), and no more than six individuals total, aboard the canoe unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board.
7. No more than two paddlers under the age of 18 are allowed on a canoe at any time unless otherwise authorized by the DSUSA Board.
8. Paddlers must notify the steersperson of any physical conditions that may affect their ability to react or respond in an emergency. A steersperson may decline to seat a paddler who, in the steersperson's sole opinion, may not have the ability to perform his/her designated tasks.

9. All paddlers must be on the lookout for dangerous situations at all times. The steersperson must also be aware of river hazards and avoid hazardous places, as outlined in the "Guidelines For River Hazards."
10. If paddlers are changing positions on the canoe during a practice, all other paddlers must lean left, regardless of whether this command is specifically given by the steersperson.

Guidelines for Weather/Currents

DSUSA reserves the right to cancel all practices in the event of severe weather conditions. Teams/crews with practices scheduled during these times will be issued credits for missed practices.

Wind: If strong winds are forecasted, the minimum number of paddlers in a dragon boat must be increased to correspond with the increased wind resistance. If winds are forecasted between 11 and 17 mph (10 to 15 knots), the minimum number of experienced paddlers must be increased to at least 10 and preferably should be increased to 12. If winds are forecasted between 17 and 23 mph (15 to 20 knots), the minimum number of experienced paddlers must be increased to at least 14 and preferably should be increased to 16. If winds are forecasted above 23 mph (20 knots), all teams/crews must not go out. Please refer to the wind speeds posted by WindAlert for specific data.

Current: If the river current is strong, as happens during heavy rains, the minimum number of paddlers in a dragon boat should be increased to correspond with the increased river flow. Consult the NWS River Forecast Data for the Willamette River at Portland for specific data and a link to the hydrologic predictions for water velocity measured in feet per second (fps). Generally, flows during the offseason (October through February) will warrant that the minimum number of experienced paddlers must be increased to at least 10 and preferably should be increased to 12. If flows are greater than 2.5 fps, the minimum number of experienced paddlers must be increased to at least 14 and preferably should be increased to 16. If flows are greater than 3 fps, all teams/crews must not go out. Please note that even if strong currents subside, practices may remain canceled if dangerous large debris is present.

Lightning: If there is lightning forecasted or present in the immediate area, DSUSA boats are not allowed to go out and boats that are on the river must return to the dock. If the boat a significant distance upstream or downstream from the RiverPlace Marina, the tiller should evaluate whether there is another closer nearby dock where the boat may be safely docked, and the team/crew may take cover, until the storm passes.

Fog/Reduced Visibility: A minimum of 150 yards of unrestricted visibility must be available for DSUSA boats to go out. The dragon boat tiller or outrigger steersperson is responsible for determining whether there is enough visibility to safely conduct a practice. Extra care should be exercised in the presence of any fog or similar reduced visibility conditions. Teams/crews caught on the river during a sudden fog should proceed with extreme caution, stopping often to look and listen for other boats.

Extreme Temperatures: Practice at the discretion of the caller or steersperson.

Guidelines for River Hazards

Debris: Generally, debris is not moving fast enough to do serious damage or cause injuries. Nonetheless, contact should be avoided. Debris that accumulates against docks, barges, etc., on the upstream side poses the greatest danger because the water can flow through the debris, but a boat or person cannot. These are known by most boaters as "strainers" and they can be quite dangerous as swimmers can be pinned under or against the debris by a strong current.

Wakes: Wakes can swamp a dragon boat if taken directly on the side or the bow. In addition, some dragon boats may capsize. It is best to head into or away from wakes at a 30 to 45 degree angle.

Other Boats:

- Dragon boat callers and tillers should be aware that they can block visibility of the bow and stern lights. When another boat is approaching, the tiller should turn the dragon boat so that its lights are visible to the other boat.
- Be aware of the Ross Island Sand & Gravel tugs and barges and where they travel. Also be aware that the tugs sometimes operate without running lights on the fronts of the barges and that the barges obscure the lights of the tug, making them effectively invisible from the front on dark nights.
- Be aware of large tour boats (such as the Portland Spirit/Crystal Dolphin/Willamette Star), especially when exiting the marina.
- Jet skis, wakeboard boats, and other speed craft can create big wakes. Nuisance boaters may be reported (be sure to get a hull identification number) to the Oregon State Marine Board. If you have a mobile phone with you, and it is safe to do so, you may call the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office River Patrol Unit at 503-823-3333.

Stop and Rescue Points Along the Willamette River (PDF)

Areas of Operation

DSUSA boats are not permitted:

- Along the seawall (west side) downstream from (north of) the marina.
- In the middle of the channel, except to cross the river.
- The shallow areas immediately downstream and upstream from Ross Island. Grounding a boat can cause serious damage and there is a risk of injury if paddlers are forced to get into the water to float a boat free.
- The shallow areas along the west bank between the Marquam Bridge and Ross Island Bridge and, in particular, between the west tower of the Tilikum Crossing and the west shore.

Areas to exercise caution:

- Near industrial areas and barges downstream (north of) the Steel Bridge.
- The Holgate Channel (between Ross Island and the east shore) is especially dangerous at night because of the tugs/barges. At all times, teams should stay close to shores in the Channel. When the river is low, it is best to stick to the east shore as larger boats tend to hug the west shore (closest to the island) where the water is deeper.
- The entrance to the lagoon on Ross Island. Watch for exiting tugs.
- Areas directly upstream from the marinas and the Zidell barge (strainer hazard).
- The area near the barge pier/conveyor belt just upstream (south of) from OMSI. The conveyor transports rock debris into barges-when it is running, lights on the side of it come on, and teams must keep clear of this area and any barges that are being loaded (as barges can sometimes flip over during the loading process).

Penalties and Fines

DSUSA members and teams/crews must follow DragonSports Safety Rules and Guidelines while renting and using DSUSA boats and equipment. Failure to follow DragonSports Safety Rules and Guidelines may result in fines or the suspension of DSUSA membership and/or practices as follows:

First violation: A written notice of violation will be sent to the offending individual from the DSUSA Board, copied to the team/crew contact. If it cannot be determined who the individual violator is among a team/crew, the notice of violation will be issued to the entire team/crew and sent to the team/crew contact.

Second violation: A written notice of violation will be sent to the offending individual from the DSUSA Board, copied to the team/crew contact, and a \$50 fine will be assessed, payable to DSUSA within 15 days. Individual violators that choose not to pay the fine, or fail to pay the fine within 15 days, will be suspended from DSUSA. If it cannot be determined who the individual violator is among a team/crew, and this is the second violation by a team/crew within one year, the notice of violation will be sent to the team/crew contact and a \$100 fine will be assessed, payable to DSUSA within 15 days. Teams/crews that choose not to pay the fine, or fail to pay the fine within 30 days, will forfeit all future practice privileges with DSUSA.

Third violation: A written notice of violation will be sent to the offending individual from the DSUSA Board, copied to the team/crew contact, resulting in immediate membership suspension from DSUSA. If it cannot be determined who the individual violator is among a team/crew, and this is the third violation by a team/crew within one year, the notice of violation will be sent to the team/crew contact and the team/crew will lose any earned scheduling priority in the following calendar year.