

Junior Safety – written by Grace Morissette & Doug Mancell

In this age of litigation, junior development programs must be well planned and safe. Climate and water temperature considerations must factor into almost all aspects of safety. Some of the concerns listed below may seem a little over zealous but remember that we are dealing with youth who don't necessarily think about the potential dangers, and things can go very wrong quickly on the ocean: it is vital that all the potential safety risks are covered to ensure personal safety.

All new junior paddlers must fill in a form that lists any medical concerns and an individuals' swimming ability. The form should also have emergency contact numbers. This could be part of the club's registration package.

A clothing list should be distributed to all juniors before they come to practice. Many teenagers do not understand the dangers associated with our cold climate. Due to economic considerations we can't expect our juniors to have wetsuit boots or other high-tech. warm weather gear but, if not taught otherwise, some teenagers are certain to come to practice on a cold day wearing nylon shorts or jeans and a cotton T-shirt. They simply are not allowed on the water unless dressed properly for the conditions. Cotton clothing of any sort should be discouraged; even in the warm summer months a wet crew wearing cotton on a windy day will get very uncomfortable. Even with a clothing list and a meeting to discuss clothing issues, some juniors will come unprepared: if spare clothing is available then perhaps they can be let on the water but otherwise, do not let them in a boat as this sends the wrong message to others.

Personal floatation devices must be worn by all juniors at all times regardless of swimming ability. The PFD also acts as an insulator.

Newer junior crews should always have the ama weighted until they become proficient at paddling and righting a canoe.

Juniors must be competent with righting an overturned outrigger. Huli clinics can take place at a local pool prior to going out on the water so that all paddlers are familiar with the procedures before getting into an outrigger. Procedures should be reviewed prior to practices; each seat has a job so just call out the seat number and make sure that each seat knows their responsibility. Once an OC6 suddenly overturns the crew may become disoriented and forget individual responsibilities so give a two minute review before practice. Many juniors love the thrill of jumping into the water so, once the weather warms up a huli clinic can be arranged in the ocean but this can not take place until July so book a pool in the meantime.

Juniors should stay within 5 boat-lengths from shore. This is not always easy to control but it should be encouraged as much as possible. They should never be farther from shore than they can comfortably swim.

A coach boat with a qualified power squadron operator should accompany all junior practices on the water.

School districts have a Junior/Adult ratio policy. This ratio may differ between districts and for different environments. For example, ratio for land activities will differ from that of water activities. In Coquitlam school district we have a 1/12 adult to junior ratio for water activities.

Look at long-term athlete development in terms of a junior program – is the program going to support future generations of paddlers? Physiological and psychological factors must be considered in program planning (good technical training, social implications, over-use injury prevention, education regarding nutrition and hydration, adequate preparation for long distance racing vs sprint type races