

Guidance Notes for Leading a Group (updated 16/2/2010)

IOPCC has a responsibility to ensure that its trips are run in a safe and proper manner. As such, the following guidance has been produced on group safety, to ensure a consistent approach to ensuring the safety of members whilst out on IOPCC organized trips.

As a general rule, all IOPCC sea kayaking trips involving a trip, i.e. where a journey is undertaken that takes the group away from the launch site, should follow these basic rules:

- An experienced member of the group should be identified as the front marker. For obvious reasons, this should be someone who knows where they are going. The front marker is responsible for ensuring that the front of the group does not drift apart from the rear marker.
- An experienced member of the group should be identified as the rear marker. The rear marker is responsible for marking the rear of the group by staying behind ALL other paddlers to mark the rear of the group to both the front marker and the group leader.
- An experienced member of the group should be identified as the left (port) marker, responsible for ensuring all members remain to their right
- An experienced member of the group should be identified as the right (starboard) marker, responsible for ensuring all members remain to their left.
- When paddling close to cliffs, surf zones, rocks etc the left and right markers should be experienced enough to mark the limit of the safe zone and to ensure that no member of the group strays out of this.
- The trip leader should position themselves in a suitable position where they are comfortable that they can see the front, back and side markers. Note there is no requirement for the leader to be in front!
- Where leaders and markers are carrying VHF radios, a working channel and suitable call-signs must be agreed prior to the trip departing.
- All other members of the group should be informed that they must stay within the positions held by the marker, i.e.
 - Do not overtake the front marker
 - Do not paddle to the left of the left marker (and right of the right marker)
 - Do not deliberately paddle behind the rear marker.
- All other members of the group should be informed that the group will travel at the speed of the back marker, i.e. that the front of the group will not paddle ahead too far.
- Consideration should be given to buddying up experienced paddlers with less experienced within the group, where appropriate.

The above guidance is equally applicable to large lakes, harbours, estuaries and large, calm rivers (think River Thames through London).

This guidance is not applicable to whitewater kayaking, where IOPCC will ensure that an appropriately skilled leader will always lead trips.

In certain circumstances, the sea kayak trip leader may, for various reasons, vary this approach, in which case they should ensure that the following key principles are maintained:

- **C**ommunication – the group leader should ensure that communication between all members within the group is possible, e.g. VHF radios, signals etc.
- **L**ine of Sight – the group leader should ensure that constant line of sight is maintained with all group members
- **A**voidance – If in doubt, the group should avoid any dangerous hazard or activity
- **P**osition of most usefulness – the group leader should arrange the position of themselves and experienced assistants within the group to maximise their effectiveness in the event of a capsize etc.

These can easily be remembered as the word “**CLAP**”.