

TRR Safety Protocol

Introduction

As TRR Staff/Volunteer, you take on the rewarding and challenging role of meeting and familiarizing participants and their family members to boating who have never paddled before, and who may only boat occasionally. In addition, participants may be recovering from substantial physical injury. Beyond simply incurring no danger, harm or injury on trips, minding the following guidelines will help you encourage, support and inspire Staff/Volunteer and participants so they'll recall their experience(s) with us fondly.

Please note that all adventure paddling programs are a part of TRR's national mission-this Safety Protocol document seeks to cover the growing variety of TRR's paddling programs.

TRR has a working relationship with the ACA ([American Canoe Association](#)) and DS/USA ([Disabled Sports USA](#)). TRR sites promote ACA and DS/USA safety and instruction guidelines.

Trip Event Requirements

Solid attention to pre-trip planning pays huge dividends in safety and enjoyment for both the event leader but all the participants as well. Start with a [Float Plan](#). The sample Float Plan is focused on whitewater events, coastal paddling needs to cover tides and currents. Lake or open water paddling venues should consider important details of a Float Plan as well. Event leaders should have a list of Emergency Contacts and Support Persons – these are usually incorporated into the Float Plan. All Chapters should document cut-off criteria for their main venues perhaps with alternative sites. For instance river levels corresponding to [American Whitewater](#) color coding, purple clearly marks the run as above recommended levels. The same approach is used for Coastal venues. NOAA provides these reports and many beaches use a Flag System where [Red Flag](#) is clearly unsuitable. TRR promotes family gatherings but some venues may require age limits. These should be clearly communicated to the participants when announcing the trip. If the event is strenuous, careful vetting of pre existing medical issues may be advised.

Event coordinators must always keep safety in mind. Although rare, establish cancellation criteria well before the event and ideally document. This helps to avoid second guessing the day of the event.

Common reasons for cancellation (or relocating to a more suitable venue are:

- Unsafe environmental conditions: weather, river levels, upstream spills.
- Insufficient support persons. The ACA generally requires no more than a 5:1 ratio (participants/support person). TRR strives for an even tighter ratio. When events involve children, you must always have at least two adults per group.
- Insufficient participants
- Road, Park or other closures
- Insufficient quantity of suitable equipment – Rarely an issue for TRR but something to keep in mind. Please contact Regional Coordinators for any needed adaptive gear in time for the paddling activity.

Alcohol / Drugs

In general, it's best to avoid bringing alcohol to TRR events. Many TRR participants are taking various medications as part of ongoing care (like painkillers) and alcohol can have unfavorable side effects when

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combined. TRR events often have participants under the legal drinking age in some states. TRR must follow all Federal and State laws and you are representing TRR in some capacity.

Some participants may have special medical needs like an EpiPen for severe allergic reactions. These special conditions need to be shared with the support team, so they can respond/assist in a timely manner that doesn't exceed their First Aid level of training.

Group Gear

All events require a few items of group gear. This gear should be spread out among the support persons to avoid a single point of failure (and not to overload any boat). Evaluate group gear requirements based on the type of event. Some common group gear is as follows (not all are required):

- [First Aid Kit](#) - Preferably two (2). ACA Instructors are required to have current First Aid Certification. Support boaters should try to emulate this standard.
- Communications – Carry a cell phone in a waterproof/crushproof case like a Pelican Box or take advantage of the new waterproof cell phones. Early contact of EMS (Emergency Management Services) can save lives.
- Spare Breakdown Paddle – These are far more suitable than hand paddles. They can also fit in any river kayak (even play boats).
- Full Size Throw Ropes – A full size rope is 70' x 3/8". These can be used for portages, boat rescues, swimmer rescues, and other uses. Size really matters both in strength (diameter) and length for river crossings.
- Pin Kit (optional-based on paddling venue)– The standard is:
 - Four (4) Carabiners
 - Three (3) Pulleys
 - Two (2) pre-tied prusik loops
 - One (1) 30' x 1" climbing webbing
 - I often add a stainless-steel camp saw and river gloves – these get more usage

NOTE: Pin Kits are not commonly used, more for smaller creek boating. Fortunately, micro-pulleys make these very light and affordable.

- Repair Kit (optional) – Multi-use tool, Gorilla Tape, thin cord, safety pins, waterproof matches, Aquaseal
- Sound Device for Coastal Environments – This is required by law
- Trip leaders and staff should also make every effort to adapt boats and paddle based on the need of the paddler prior to paddle session. Check and re check the adaptive methods being used to make certain adaptive paddlers fit well, are balanced, and instructional/support volunteers are ready to provide any needed help.

Participant Gear

Participants carry personal gear, some provided by TRR and others they bring on their own.

- TRR typically provides: Adequate variety of boats, paddles, helmets, skirts, PFDs. If the participant brings their own, support persons should inspect for suitability and safety.
- Adequate Thermal Gear for the conditions. Pay close attention to children as hypothermia is a serious issue.

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- Always inspect the helmet, PFD, boats, and spray skirts for fit. Get in the practice of inspecting the Spray Skirt Loop (must be outside) and Drain Plug (secured) after every break.
- Support boaters will inspect participant gear for safety hazards like loops that can snag, secure fit, suitable footwear, etc.
- Snacks & Liquids. Dehydration is a common issue at all times of the year – even winter. Paddling can be a strenuous activity so water or sports drinks (summer) are necessary. Drink frequently to avoid cramping and help regulate your body temperature. High energy foods like nuts, trail mix, or snack bars help maintain energy levels throughout the day.
- Proper footwear is essential. All participants must wear shoes for all TRR paddling events. In addition, avoid sandals which can snag causing a deadly foot entrapment. Trip leaders should turn away participants in bare feet.

Shuttle

Get in the habit of a Group Gear Check and verify participant gear **before** setting shuttle, issues are much easier to address. Inspect roof rack tie downs – make certain they are snug enough for sudden stops and off-road travel. In general, front and rear tie downs should be used in addition to the usual cross ties.

Putin

Get in the Risk Management best practice of delivering a short Safety & Waiver talk at the Putin. Although everyone has signed a waiver, redundancy is important and only takes a few minutes. Make no promises of safety, outdoor conditions provide numerous hidden dangers (like old lost throw ropes snagged below the water surface). The following article from the countries leading expert witness for whitewater incidents is well worth reading: [Risk Management in Six Steps](#).

Worth repeating, always inspect spray skirt loops and drain plugs at every break. Boaters should stick together, clearly identify the lead boater (Scout) and Sweep Boater – they maintain group cohesion. Review signs & signals, whitewater can be a noisy environment and some paddlers may have hearing issues. Remind participants to always wear the helmet and PFD when within 10' of the water edge.

On the Water

Support boaters must maintain strong situational awareness. Take notice of changing river conditions (rising or falling). Keep a close eye on the participants as well, dealing with Hypothermia or Hyperthermia early enough can save lives. Pay extra attention to those that have taken a long cold swim, offer high energy food and water to help them regain their composure and strength. Consider assigning a support boater to them until it's obvious they are OK.

The Scout (and others) need to keep a close eye out for wood on the river and other obstacles like sieves and undercut formations. In general portage all man made features, they may have hidden exposed reinforcement bars which can at best damage boats. A good rule of thumb is: If in Doubt – Scout! Consider setting safety for more challenging rapids. Always carry a throw rope when portaging or scouting a rapid – you never know when someone may get in trouble.

Develop and communicate your Emergency Action Plan. This is usually discussed during the pre-trip briefing at the Putin along with signs & signals. Mention the known hazards if any. In an emergency, participants are signaled via 3 whistle blasts and should head to the nearest feasible shore. Support boaters will assess the situation and implement the rescue. Complex rescues may need an Incident

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Command Structure (ICS). The point person for this role will be assigned by the trip coordinator. If evacuation is necessary, follow your written evacuation strategy in your Float Plan.

Training Requirements by Role

TRR provides exceptional support for training and certification. The following roles require specialized training:

- Trip Leader: ACA or BCU certification at or above the venue level. Alternative experience can be substituted at the Chapter Leaders discretion. TRR member participants who have actively built skills based on the TRR Pathway to Endorsement can also be considered.
- Safety Boaters: Attendance of a Swiftwater Rescue Skills Class within the past four (4) years.
- Medic: Suitable hands-on First Aid and CPR certification. Wilderness First Aid (WFA) or higher is recommended for venues over one hour away from definitive care.
- The ACA Adaptive Paddling Endorsement is highly recommended.