

The Quick Guide for New Guests on the Berkeley Dragon Boat

Welcome to the Berkeley Marina, and welcome to dragon boating.

First a few safety reminders:

- 1) There is always a very small possibility that you will be dumped into very cold water, and not be able to climb out for several minutes or more. If you have a physical condition that would make cold water immersion dangerous (such as a heart condition or pregnancy) then dragon boat paddling on San Francisco Bay may not be an appropriate activity for you. Do not participate without first discussing this with the person in charge.
- 2) If you are a non-swimmer or a weak swimmer, or have any other condition that might require special attention during a spill in the Bay, be sure to bring this to the attention of the person in charge. It doesn't mean you can't go out, but it is very important that the person responsible for the safety of the crew know exactly what your limitations might be.
- 3) Wear a life jacket at all times. Only adult BRCC members who have certified their swimming ability may paddle without a lifejacket, and only when the boat is inside the marina.
- 4) Don't forget to sign the BRCC waiver form. It will save time if you download it in advance from <http://www.BerkeleyRCC.org>, from the "documents and forms" page. Bring the completed form with you to the boat.

Paddling and maneuvering commands:

No need to memorize these, you will pick them up very quickly by watching what the people around you are doing.

PADDLES UP: prepare to paddle, holding paddle blade just above water.

TAKE IT AWAY: begin paddling. Normally this is only used following the "paddles up" command.

LET IT RIDE: stop paddling and let the boat coast.

HOLD WATER or HOLD THE BOAT: hold paddle blade in the water to stop the boat. This is sometimes used for an emergency stop. If you only memorize one command in advance, it should be this one.

BRACE THE BOAT: hold paddle blade in the water, turned horizontal so that the boat will not roll as quickly. Normally used when paddlers are changing position in the boat.

BACK PADDLE: paddle in reverse.

DRAW LEFT or DRAW RIGHT: paddle to produce side thrust, by reaching out and paddling in the direction called. Paddlers on the opposite side lean out to help balance. For example, for the "draw left" command, paddlers on the left side reach out and paddle to pull the boat to the left, while paddlers on the right side lean out to the right for balance.

PADDLES ON THE GUN'L: a rest position, holding the paddle horizontal and resting on the edge of the boat with the blade out.

ATTENTION PLEASE: prepares for a race start, blade in the water. This is normally used following a "paddles up" command.

GO: start paddling for a race start. This is only used after the "attention please" command.

Most commands can be modified by specifying the row or side that the command applies to, e.g. "front three draw left, back three draw right" will rotate the boat counter-clockwise. A similar result can be obtained with "left side back-paddle, right side forward paddle."

Paddle commands can also be modified for power level and for the number of strokes desired, e.g. "take it away light, three strokes" for a short burst at low power. "take it away 50 per cent, three strokes" has the same meaning. Or "first five rows, take it away three strokes" to have only half the paddlers working, another way of achieving the same effect on the boat.

What to do if the boat swamps

Swamping is rare, but can be dangerous if it does happen. The water is very cold and survival time for a swimmer can be less than 30 minutes.

The boat has permanent foam floatation under each thwart, but this will only hold up the boat, not the crew. The water must be bailed out before the crew can be supported again. When the boat swamps, the first thing to do is to get out of the boat and float alongside.

Your lifejacket will hold you up. **DO NOT USE THE BOAT FOR SUPPORT.** However, **DO NOT LET GO OF THE BOAT.** It is important to not be separated from the boat while it is being bailed out. It is equally important not to push the boat down, especially if there is danger of waves washing more water back in as the bailers try to get the water out.

If you have never floated with a lifejacket before, you will find that it tends to ride up around your neck and head, especially if you have been wearing it a little loose. Keep your arms down so it can't slip off, and hold the jacket down so that it holds you up. But remember not to let go of the boat.

Follow the instructions from the person in charge. One, two or three people will be directed to enter the boat to begin bailing. At first there will not be enough buoyancy to support any more people than those needed to bail.

The person in charge might direct some of the people in the water to move towards the bow or stern in order to help turn the boat so that the bow or stern is pointing into the waves. This is to help reduce the number of waves coming over the sides, which might make it difficult to bail.

If the boat has capsized, you might be asked to let go of the boat while a righting line is used to pull the boat upright. Follow the instructions from the person in charge.

If you believe you are having a serious problem with the cold or with staying afloat, bring this to the attention of the person in charge. As the boat is bailed it will be able to support progressively more people, and those having trouble should be the first to get out of the water.

Do not swim to shore unless the person in charge has directed you to do so. Do not try to climb out on a dock. Even with help, this is very difficult if you are cold and tired. Swim to the rocks around the edge of the Marina.

After the practice

Rinsing paddles and lifejackets is not necessary after every practice, but on Saturdays when the sun is out they should be rinsed with fresh water. Allow the lifejackets to drain for a few minutes before hanging them in the locker. Make sure the hose is neatly coiled and turned off.

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