

# Risk Assessment – Night Time Paddle to Woodmill (River Itchen)

**Activity:** Supervised night-time paddle to Woodmill and return

**Location:** River Itchen, Southampton (St Denys to Woodmill and return)

**Activity Type:** Supervised Session (darkness / low-light conditions)

**Date last reviewed:** 23 January 2026

**Assessor:** James Wardle

**Reviewed by:**

**Review due:** January 2027

## Scope and Context

This risk assessment applies to a supervised night-time paddle from St Denys Boat Club to Woodmill and return on the River Itchen.

Paddling in darkness introduces additional hazards compared to daytime river paddling, including reduced visibility of obstacles, increased risk of separation, reduced ability of other river users to see the group, and slower response to incidents.

This activity will be run with an emphasis on clear group control, effective communication, and appropriate lighting/visibility equipment. Leaders are responsible for dynamic risk assessment and adapting the route and plan to conditions and participant ability.

## Night-Time Add-On Controls (Additional Requirements)

- Minimum of two competent leaders present, including a nominated Lead and Sweep (rear-marker).
- Buddy system in place: paddlers paired and responsible for keeping visual contact with their buddy at all times.
- Group kept compact with regular headcounts (e.g., at bridges, turning points, and any regroup points).
- All paddlers to carry a working white light (visible 360° where practicable) and a backup light where possible.
- Leaders to carry a higher-power torch/headtorch for scanning banks, identifying hazards, and signalling.
- High-visibility clothing / reflective elements encouraged (deck/helmet/BA reflective tape).

- Clear pre-brief on route, hazards, regroup points, emergency plan, and expected behaviour (no overtaking the leader; sweep stays last).
- Phones carried in waterproof cases; at least one spare power bank available within the group.
- Whistles mandatory; simple sound signals agreed (stop / regroup / emergency).
- Strict go/no-go criteria: cancel if strong winds, heavy rain, poor visibility, high flows, or unsafe temperature conditions.
- No deliberate capsize practice; avoid tight manoeuvres near obstructions; adopt a conservative pace.

## Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures (night-time specific)	Risk Level	Further Actions
Reduced visibility (obstacles, banks, submerged hazards)	All participants	Collision, capsizing, injury	Leaders carry scanning torches/headtorches. Conservative pace. Group briefed on known hazards (bridges, overhanging trees, debris). Keep mid-channel where safe.	Medium	Reassess route on the day; turn back if hazards increase
Separation / getting lost in darkness	All participants (especially less confident paddlers)	Increased risk, delayed assistance	Buddy system + compact group formation + Lead/Sweep system. Regular headcounts at regroup points. No one paddles ahead of the Lead or behind the Sweep.	Medium	Stop immediately if a paddler is unaccounted for
Other river users not seeing the group	All participants, other water users	Collision	White lights carried by paddlers. Reflective clothing encouraged. Leaders use lights to signal and identify hazards. Avoid high-traffic times if possible.	Medium	Move to bank and regroup if traffic approaches
Capsize in cold water at night	All participants	Cold shock, panic, hypothermia, drowning	Appropriate clothing for temperature (wetsuit/drysuit recommended depending on season). No deliberate capsize drills. Leaders ready to assist rescues quickly. Immediate return to club if immersion occurs.	Medium	Carry spare warm layers and hot drink where practical
Communication difficulties	All participants	Delayed response to incidents	Pre-agreed whistle signals. Phones in waterproof cases. Keep group close for voice contact. Leaders positioned to maintain control.	Low–Medium	Re-brief signals if group changes
Launching/landing slips and trips in the dark	All participants	Minor to moderate injury	Use stable launch points. Adequate lighting at launch/landing. Assistance provided for entry/exit. Slow controlled movement on slipways.	Low–Medium	Choose alternate landing point if unsafe
Fatigue / anxiety (night environment)	Less experienced participants	Reduced performance, panic	Short route and regular breaks. Encourage participants to speak up early. Leaders monitor wellbeing closely. Option to shorten/abort.	Low–Medium	Limit participant numbers for first night sessions
Equipment failure	All participants	Reduced	Pre-check lights and spare batteries. At least one	Low–	Maintain club 'night

(lights/phone)		safety margin	backup torch in group. Spare power bank carried. Defects = do not participate.	Medium	kit' bag
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## General Notes

- This is a supervised night-time session; leaders remain responsible for group management and dynamic risk assessment.
- Participants must follow instructions, stay with their buddy, and remain within the group boundaries at all times.
- The session may be modified or stopped if conditions become unsuitable.
- This risk assessment should be reviewed annually or following any incident or near miss.