

Risk Assessment – SUP Social Paddle (Self-led) – River Itchen

Activity: SUP Social Paddle (Self-led) – River Itchen

Location: River Itchen, Southampton (club area and agreed route)

Activity Type: Self-led Social Session (peer-to-peer)

Date last reviewed: 23 January 2026

Assessor: James Wardle

Reviewed by:

Review due: January 2027

Scope and Context

This risk assessment covers a relaxed social SUP paddle on the River Itchen run as a self-led, peer-to-peer session.

There is no formal instruction or supervision. Participants take responsibility for their own safety while paddling as a group and looking out for one another.

Because it is self-led, the controls focus on clear boundaries, personal capability, and group cohesion.

Additional Controls (Activity Specific)

- Self-led declaration: participants understand this is not coached or supervised; each paddler is responsible for their own decisions and safety.
- Minimum personal kit: buoyancy aid, suitable clothing for immersion, whistle, phone in waterproof case, and appropriate leash policy (waist leash preferred; quick release).
- Route and boundaries agreed before launch, including turnaround time, regroup points, and maximum distance from the club.
- Buddy system: paddlers pair up and keep visual contact; agree a 'stop and regroup' rule if anyone is missing.
- Conditions check at start: wind direction/strength, temperature, visibility. If marginal, shorten the paddle or cancel.
- No solo paddling: if fewer than 3 paddlers attend, the session should not proceed unless an alternative safety plan is agreed.
- Respect other river users and avoid congested areas; keep the group compact.

Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures	Risk Level	Further Actions
Lack of supervision (self-led)	All participants	Delayed assistance in incident	Peer-to-peer buddy system; keep group compact; agree emergency plan; phones carried; avoid higher-risk conditions; conservative route.	Medium	Encourage at least one experienced paddler to attend
Separation	All participants	Loss of contact, increased risk	Buddy system and regroup points; agreed turnaround time; stop immediately if someone is not accounted for.	Low-Medium	Choose shorter route in wind/current
Immersion / cold exposure	All participants	Hypothermia, reduced dexterity	Appropriate clothing; warm layer available; shorten session in winter; return to club if anyone is cold or fatigued.	Low-Medium	Promote drysuit/wetsuit guidance seasonally
Leash snag/entanglement	Participants	Entrapment risk	Prefer waist leash with quick release; avoid known snags; keep off overhanging vegetation; demonstrate quick release in brief.	Low-Medium	Remind at start each time
Collision with other users	All	Injury / capsize	Keep lookout; slow down near traffic; do not block channel; maintain spacing.	Low	Avoid peak rowing times where possible
Slipway/pontoon hazards	All	Minor injury	Controlled entry/exit; assist each other; keep area clear; no rushing.	Low	Use alternative access if slippery

General Notes

- This risk assessment should be reviewed annually or following any incident or near miss.