

SAFETY BULLETIN No.6 of 2020

Use of Leashes for Stand-Up Paddleboards (SUPs)

Several incidents involving Stand Up Paddleboards in the upper reaches of the tidal Thames have been reported in the last 6 months. The incidents were serious and could have resulted in fatalities.

Incident reports show that paddleboarders have fallen into the water close to river infrastructure (e.g. piers, pontoons, buoys, etc). In these instances, the board was swept to one side of the infrastructure and the paddleboarder swept to the other side and in all cases the boarder was wearing an ankle leash and were unable to quickly release themselves from their board. Fortunately, other river users were nearby and helped release the paddleboarder from their board. If the paddleboarder had been alone they could have drowned.

The Port of London Authority (PLA) does not endorse the use of ankle or knee leashes on the tidal Thames. The fast-flowing nature of the river and the risk of being caught either side of river infrastructure makes it difficult to release an ankle leash. **If wearing a leash, use a quick-release waist leashes as recommended by British Canoeing.**

SUP is a fast-growing water sport which is best suited to the calmer waters found upriver of Putney Bridge. Therefore, it is vital for all river users safety that SUPs follows the rules and safety guidance within the [Tideway Code](#).

There are several ways to reduce the risk of such incidents, examples of which are:



Quick-release waist leashes are recommended

1. If choosing to wear a leash wear a **quick release waist leash** and ensure that it sits above the hip and the release buckle is in front. Alternatively, the best type for moving water are those which are attached to a buoyancy aid and therefore are easy to locate and release.

2. On the tidal Thames all Stand Up Paddleboarders **must** use a buoyancy aid

3. Prepare a suitable **passage plan** which highlights the dangers you may encounter on your journey and how you will mitigate risks

4. Keep a **proper look out** and respond to developing situations which are likely to affect your safety, or the safety of those around you in a timely manner.

5. Consider undertaking a **training course** and expand your knowledge of tidal Thames.

This safety bulletin is issued as an addendum to the [Tideway Code](#) and should be inserted into all copies of the Tideway Code currently in circulation. For further information on Stand Up Paddleboarding and other recreational activities available on the Thames please visit: www.boatingonthames.co.uk.

3 July 2020

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Telephone calls, VHF radio traffic, CCTV and radar traffic images may be recorded in the VTS Centres at Gravesend and Woolwich

