

Safety Guidelines

General Safety at any Water Event or Training Location

General Comments

In preparing these Guidelines we have attempted to cover the various water-training situations likely to be experienced by people working with their Newfoundland's. The safety points listed are collected from the experience of a number of working Groups, and are aimed particularly at the more formal Group working session. However, we believe these Guidelines contain good advice and procedures for people working their dogs with just family and/or friends, and while it may not be possible or necessary under these circumstances to fulfil all the safety points, these Guidelines are given to encourage individuals to think and act safely.

Much of Safety is being "sensible" and being "aware", and this is particularly important with respect to your own and your dog's health. Remember when training with others they are dependent on you as are the dogs. If they get into difficulty they need your help, which could be a problem if you are not up to it. Also they are there to help you, but you increase the risks for all when you train when unfit or unwell. Watch out for each other and if someone seems in distress suggest they leave the water.

You should also be aware of how your dog is feeling, for example if it shows any reluctance to get into the car or to enter the water, or has had obvious tummy problems, then leave it for that day.

People and dogs tire more easily in cold conditions, so limit the time spent in cold water, and do not stand around in a wet wetsuit in cold weather. Similarly in hot weather it is essential to keep cool and to take in fluids to avoid heat exhaustion. This is especially a problem for people in thick wetsuits.

Swimming is like any other form of exercise, it will keep you fit but do not enter the water for the first time in 10 years and try to cross the lake. Take it easy at first and build up gradually. If you are unfit or suffer from any form of ill health then take medical advice.

What is Appropriate Training for your dog?

All the Newfoundland Club tests have age qualifications and these are good guidelines. Swimming is a great exercise for a young dog as it exercises all the muscles without putting any strain on joints or bones. However dogs less than 12 months should never be allowed to jump in and out of boats as this can harm the hip or shoulder and elbow joints.

Also young dogs tire more easily, especially in cold water. Young bodies are less able to regulate temperature so watch them carefully, in all weather, and dry them thoroughly after a swim. In cold weather let them rest somewhere warm and dry, and keep an eye on them.

As for older dogs, again swimming is a great exercise for older dogs, even dogs with severe hip displasia have derived great benefit from swimming. However too much exercise can put a strain on dogs who have ill health such as heart problems and veterinary advice should always be sought. Again be sensitive to what your dog's mood and actions are telling you.

Basic control of your dog is a pre-requisite for being able to train it to do the exercises you want it to do, it is also a major element of safe working with your dog. All dogs coming to water training should be properly under control for your own safety, and for the safety of the people and dogs working with you.

Insurance

1. Individuals are strongly recommended to have their own Public Liability Insurance cover for themselves and their dogs, and insurance for their own equipment.
2. Groups should also have Public Liability Insurance covering their group activities as well as insurance for any group equipment.
3. If a group is running an event open to the public, then the group's Public Liability Insurance must be prominently displayed.
4. When an event is run under the auspices of the Newfoundland Club eg Club Water Tests, the Newfoundland Club's insurance will cover the event, however their insurance does not cover any equipment lent by members for the event, which should be insured as in 1. Above. A copy of the Newfoundland Club Insurance Certificate should be prominently displayed at the event.

General Safety at any Water Event or Training Location

1. Training must not take place unless there is a minimum of three people present, two of whom should be strong swimmers. A wet/dry suit or buoyancy aid must be worn by anyone in or on the water.
2. The safety of the site should be checked before each session, particularly checking for glass, underwater hazards, fishing lines, other users of the water or land. In the summer checks for Blue Green Algae should be made and if present dogs and humans must be kept out of the water. If the dogs are to be worked in the sea or in a river then tides and currents must also be taken into account.
3. First Aid kit must be available in the training area. Telephone, either mobile or location of nearest public phone, and telephone numbers of vet and local Accident and Emergency unit must be available and prominently displayed. The Ordnance Survey map reference and a clear description of the location with the full name and address should be available with the emergency services telephone numbers.
4. Children are the responsibility of their parents/guardians at all times. It is a sensible safety precaution that if children are playing in or near the water they must be wearing wet suits or buoyancy aids. Groups should decide their own rules for the safety of any children at training sessions.
5. Be aware of the abilities of both dogs and handlers/trainers so that neither gets too tired or causes a hazard to themselves or to another dog or person working in the water. Remember that people and dogs tire more quickly in cold conditions.
6. Owners of dogs being worked must advise the group of any medical problems both for themselves and their dogs, and assume responsibility for ensuring that any problems do not create a hazard for themselves, their dog, or other persons or dogs.
7. A Safety officer must be appointed for each training session, and equipped with a whistle or horn, and a knife in a safe sheath. It is the responsibility of all group members, but particularly the Safety officer, to ensure that any new people are aware of the safety signals and general safety procedures.

8. Safety Signals on whistle or horn are:

One long blast - everyone must stop what they are doing and await instruction from the Safety Officer.

Multiple Blasts - everyone must return to shore as quickly as possible except for the strong swimmers who will act on the instruction of the Safety Officer.

9. A knife in a safe sheath should be available from the Safety Officer at all times, and one should be available in the boat when conducting boat exercises.

10. The international signal for swimmer in distress is a raised arm with clenched fist. This will also be our signal.

11. A stretcher should be available which is large enough to accommodate humans and dogs, and which can be used in and out of the water.

12. If a dog is loose and out of control all exercises cease until the dog is brought under control. .

13. It is recommended that members of working groups are encouraged to take RLSS Bronze Medallion and RLSS Open Water Certificates, also to take a First Aid course such as St John's Ambulance.

Safe Procedures for Working Dogs in Lakes

1. The number of dogs to be worked at one time is dependent on space at the water's edge and availability of trainers; what is acceptable should be agreed beforehand and enforced by the Safety Officer.
2. Always use safe equipment that will not harm dog or handler, e.g. do not use short sticks or oars which could snag and hurt the dog's mouth, and check for wire, staples and splinters on equipment.
3. Dogs must be under control at all times, if they are not under control then they should not be worked until they are.
4. Any dog working in the water should wear a suitable harness. Dog harnesses or collars should be snug fitting to prevent snagging. Choke or check collars should never be worn in the water.
5. Inexperienced handlers must be taught the correct methods of handling dogs in the water, and into and out of boats.
 - Dogs should be taught to get into and out of a boat in shallow water.
 - Dogs must never be pushed, but encouraged into the water or out of a boat.
6. Use of the word "HELP" to attract dogs to the "drowner" have caused problems for some groups with their local services and local residents. In these circumstances an alternative word has been used. However, if the situation were real then the word help would be used, so training dogs to respond is more realistic. Groups need to decide what word to use after consideration of their local conditions.

Safe Use of Boats

1. It is recommended that inflatable rubber boats (not PVC) are used whenever possible. They should be of a suitable size for the number of people and dogs to be carried (a dog is considered as one person).
2. There must be at least one other person in the boat beside the helmsman during-and at the finish of any exercise.
3. The helmsman must be able to get himself back into the boat by himself when the boat is in deep water.
4. Boats should not have looped rope handles on the side, but should have short knotted rope instead.
5. All boats should be equipped with a detachable rope or painter.
6. Boats should have enough storage space to accommodate equipment leaving the deck area clear for dog and handler.

Boats with Engines

1. The helmsman is responsible for the safety of the boat, its occupants and any person or dog swimming in the vicinity.
2. Before the engine is started the helmsman must check that the area round the boat is clear of swimmers and dogs, and that people in the vicinity are alerted.
WORKING GROUPS SHOULD HAVE AN ESTABLISHED PROCEDURE FOR THIS.
3. All outboard engines should be fitted with a dead man's cutout with a wrist/ankle strap. A spare dead man's cutout should be carried.
4. The propeller should be fitted with a suitable guard.
5. The helmsman must cut the engine if any dog or swimmer comes into the vicinity of the propeller. (eg. within 10 yards)
6. There should be a safety barrier (net) at the stern of the boat to prevent the dog leaving the boat close to the engine.
7. All helmsmen should be accepted by their group as being sufficiently competent and safety-aware, and should be encouraged to have a current RYA 2 Boat Handling Certificate or similar qualification.

Working at Sea

The basic points for safe working in lakes apply to working at sea, and in addition the following should also be considered:

1. Introduction of the dog to working at sea must be done from the shore where the same advice as for lakes concerning underwater hazards applies, but in addition watch out for new hazards exposed by falling tides. A thorough exploration of the beach at low Spring Tide is recommended to locate rocks, wrecks etc.

2. The sea is dangerous and liable to rapid condition change brought on by tides, currents and changes in weather. People working their dogs in the sea should seek as much advice as possible from local sources such as the Harbor master, Coastguard, local fishermen, and be aware of state of tide and local weather forecasts. It is hazardous to work on a falling tide or when there is an offshore wind.

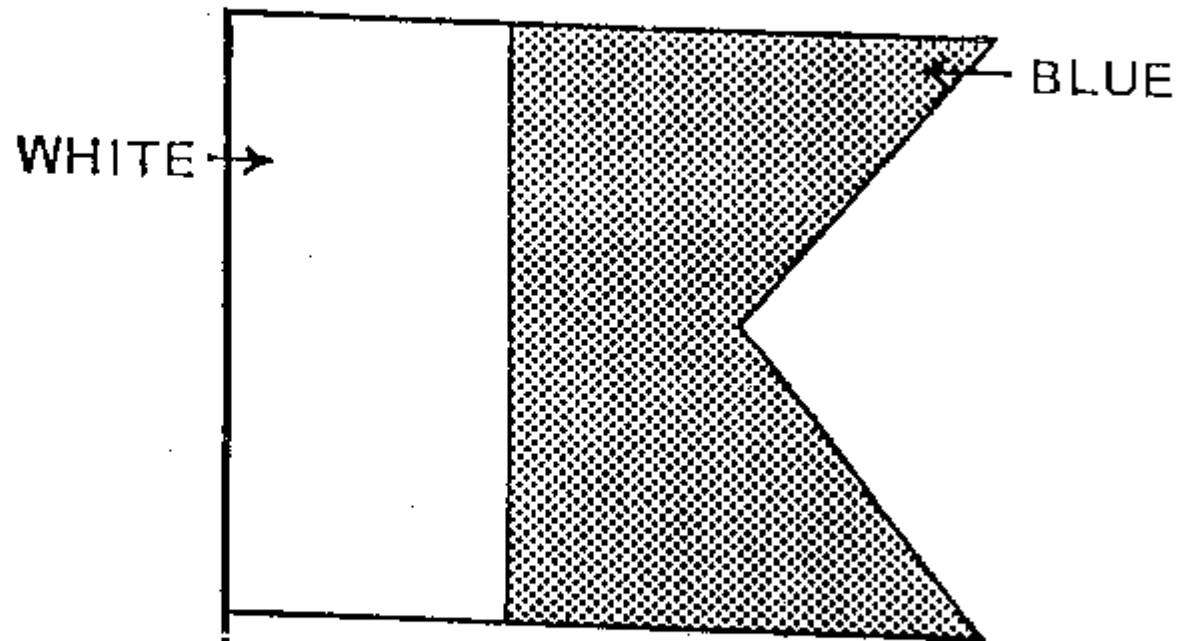
IF THERE IS ANY DOUBT THAT THE COMBINED ELEMENTS REPRESENT UNDUE DANGER - CALL THE EXERCISE OFF

3. Boats must be properly equipped for the training to be undertaken, and equipment should include:

An anchor of suitable weight and with sufficient rope
A first aid kit
Distress flares and signals
Oars
Fire extinguisher
Knife
Spare rope sufficient to be used as a towrope
Spare starter cord and spark plug.
Ship-to-shore radio and knowledge of how to use it in the location e.g. local wavebands, or a mobile phone in a waterproof case to contact the Safety officer on shore.

4. Each boat has a recommended carrying capacity and this should not be exceeded, (a dog should be considered as a person). The recommended engine size for the boat should be used, and if possible a spare engine should be carried although as it is an emergency engine it need not be of the full rated size.

5. At least two separate spare canisters of fuel in proper containers should be carried.
6. Fresh water for the dogs and drinks for the humans should be carried, and if possible warm clothing, or "space blankets" in case of a breakdown.
7. The boat needs navigation lights if there is any chance that it will still be at sea after sunset.
8. The International flag "DIVERS BELOW" is used to indicate divers and swimmers in the water and if flown while wbrking at sea would ensure other craft were aware of our activities.



WHITE →

← BLUE

INTERNATIONAL
CODE OF SIGNALS
FLAG A.
BSAC DIVING FLAG