



Risk Assessment – Harefield Wild Water Race 2025

Event: Harefield Wild Water Race – *Fury at the Weir*

Date: Saturday, 15th November 2025

Location: Harefield, UB9 6HZ

Organised by: The Sharks Canoe Club

Assessment Completed by: Grant Underwood

Assessment Date: Thursday, 18th September 2025

Safety Officer: Aaron Nolan

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1. Event Overview

The Harefield Wild Water Race – Fury at the Weir is a sprint wild water event held on the Grand Union Canal, Harefield. The course is approximately **500m**, starting below **Coppermill Lock** and finishing at the white footbridge by **Rickmansworth Sailing Club**. Estimated race time is **5–8 minutes** depending on craft and conditions.

The event is open to paddlers of all ages and abilities across a wide range of craft types, including Wild Water Racers, Wavehoppers, slalom boats, general purpose kayaks, canoes, and SUPs. Racing is time-trial format, with controlled intervals between competitors. Multiple runs are permitted, with the fastest run counting.

Safety cover will be provided both on the water and bankside, and a compulsory competitor briefing will be held before racing begins.

2. River Grade and Hazards

- **Water Classification:** Canalised river section with **Grade 1–2 features** at **Harefield Weir**, depending on water level and lock usage. Flow can change quickly if the lock is operated or during periods of high rainfall.

- **Primary Feature:** Harefield Weir — fast-flowing water, waves, and turbulent currents at the base of the weir. Conditions will be assessed on race day, and course alterations or cancellation will be made if water levels are deemed unsafe.
- **Additional Hazards:**
 1. **Canal boat traffic** – limited visibility around bends; competitors will be briefed to pass powered craft on the left.
 2. **Slalom gates** – permanent wooden structures; poles will be moved aside, but there remains risk of contact. Helmets compulsory.
 3. **Towpath** – shared with pedestrians and cyclists; potential for slips/trips. Competitors must give way to the public.
 4. **Road crossing at Coppermill Lane bridge** – busy road with traffic lights; competitors instructed not to cross with boats except when using Coy Carp access, and then only with caution.
 5. **In-water debris** – occasional branches or dumped items (e.g. bicycles) in the water; course inspection and clearance carried out pre-race.
 6. **Cold water exposure** – risk of hypothermia; mitigated by compulsory buoyancy aids, helmets, and warm blankets available at the finish.
 7. **Sewage discharge (Troy Cut / Colne Valley)** – risk of illness in case of untreated discharge. Organisers will monitor water quality in the lead-up; participants instructed to cover cuts, avoid deliberate capsizes, and seek medical attention if ill.
 8. **Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis)** – paddlers advised to cover wounds, avoid swallowing water, and seek medical help if symptoms develop.

3. Key Hazards & Controls

Hazard	Risk Level	Who is at Risk?	Controls / Mitigations
Canal traffic (powered boats, public navigation)	Collision with competitors – Low	Paddlers, water-users	Start paddlers at intervals to ensure clear course; briefing to all competitors to give way and pass boats on the left; marshals with radios at start/finish; suspend race temporarily if navigation conflict occurs.
Harefield Weir (Grade 1–2 water, variable flows)	Strong flow leading to capsize – Medium/High (depending on levels)	Paddlers, water-users	Water levels assessed before event; Safety Officer to monitor conditions; helmets & buoyancy aids compulsory; safety cover on water and bank; modify course or cancel event if unsafe.
Cold water exposure	Hypothermia - Medium	Paddlers, water-users	Warm blankets available at finish; safety advice in briefing; competitors advised on appropriate clothing; event paused in severe conditions.

Collision between paddlers	Collision, injury – Low/Medium	Paddlers	Course design provides ample space; marshals monitor and manage start intervals; competitor briefing includes collision avoidance guidance.
Capsizing	Entrapment, collision, injury – Medium	Paddlers	Self-rescue techniques explained during briefing; competitors must assist capsized paddlers when safe to do so; safety boats patrol the course and two remain at the finish line for rapid response; boats must have airbags.
Slalom gates (fixed wooden poles)	Impact injury if struck – Low	Paddlers	Poles moved aside prior to event; helmets compulsory; pre-race inspection by organisers; course monitored during event.
Towpath (Rickmansworth SC – Harefield Bridge)	Slips, trips, falls – Low/Medium	Everyone	Shoes compulsory (per WWR rules: soles thicker than uppers); access monitored; signage at key points; marshals assist.
Towpath after Harefield Weir (private residents' road)	Collision with residents' vehicles, obstruction – Low	Everyone	Competitors briefed to keep clear; marshals present; residents notified in advance.
Road traffic (Coppermill Lane, 4-way junction)	Collision when carrying boats – Medium	Everyone	Competitors instructed not to cross with boats unless using Coy Carp drop-off; briefing directs safe access under bridge via towpath; marshals positioned if needed.
Congestion at start/finish	Collision, confusion – Low/Medium	Paddlers, volunteers	Controlled starts; clear spacing instructions; designated finish area; marshals manage flow.
Entrapment / in-water obstacles (branches, dumped items)	Entrapment, injury – Medium	Paddlers, water-users	Pre-event inspection of course; organisers to remove debris where possible; paddlers briefed on hazard locations; safety cover equipped for rescue.
Slips/trips on banks / event site	Minor injury – Low	Paddlers, spectators, volunteers	Event area kept clear; access points monitored; signage in hazard areas; marshals guide safe movement.
Inexperienced paddlers	Misjudged navigation, panic in water - Low/Medium	Paddlers	Mandatory briefing; coaches available; encouragement for self-assessment of capability; event team reserves right to restrict participation if unsafe.

Equipment failure (boats, paddles, airbags)	Loss of control – Low/Medium	Paddlers	Competitors responsible for pre-checks; officials may conduct random checks; airbags mandatory; limited spares available.
Weather changes	Severe cold, wind, rain, or heat – Low/Medium	Everyone	Organisers monitor forecasts; competitors advised to dress appropriately; activities delayed, modified, or cancelled if unsafe.
Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis)	Illness through waterborne infection – Low/Medium	Water-users	Competitors advised to cover cuts/wounds; avoid swallowing water; wash hands before eating; briefing includes symptoms and need to seek urgent medical help and disclose paddling activity if unwell.
Sewage discharge (Colne Valley / Grand Union Canal)	Illness or infection – Medium	Water-users	Water quality monitored in days leading up to event; event postponed/cancelled if unsafe; competitors advised to cover wounds, avoid deliberate capsizes, and not drink water; briefing includes instruction to seek medical aid immediately if ill.
Spectators on towpath	Obstruction, slips – Low	Spectators, paddlers	Designated viewing areas; marshals manage movement; barriers/ropes in busy areas.
Access & egress	Low	Paddler	Multiple safe launch and exit points with good access; clear pathways maintained for emergency and participant movement.
Parking & transport (Troy Lake / Coy Carp)	Congestion, unsafe unloading – Low/Medium	Everyone	Designated parking at Troy Lake; Coy Carp drop-off only (no parking); marshals direct traffic; clear signage.

4. Safety Measures

- Dedicated safety team briefed and equipped with radios and rescue equipment, including throw lines and rescue boats.
- PaddleUK-qualified first aiders and event medics on site throughout the event.
- Pre-race competitor briefing covering course layout, hazards, safety protocols, and emergency procedures.
- Competency guidelines communicated pre-event; event team reserves the right to restrict participation based on skill and safety considerations.
- Marshals and signage guide paddlers and spectators safely around the venue and course area.
- Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) and Helmets mandatory for all participants.

5. Emergency Plan

- **In-Water Incident:** On-water safety personnel will assist and rescue paddlers as needed; bankside marshals coordinate additional support and medical response if required.
- **Serious Injury or Medical Emergency:** Immediate first aid administered by qualified personnel; emergency services contacted without delay via event communication channels.
- **Evacuation Routes:** Clear, unobstructed access maintained to all key points on the lake and event site for emergency vehicles and personnel.