

# Safety Guidelines

This document is not meant as an all-inclusive treatment of rowing safety, as all possible situations and types of rowing could not be covered in such a brief forum. These guidelines are meant to serve as an outline for the safety program.

## **Before the Row**

1. Eastern Shore Community Rowers will have a safety committee that will develop and annually review all the safety rules, protocols and procedures.
2. All rowers must be able to pass a swim test, preferably including putting on a life jacket while in the water.
3. Know that your shell has been designed for flotation. Your boat is not a Personal Flotation Device (PFD); it is an emergency flotation device and your oars are neither, a personal or emergency flotation device. The safety committee recommends that all unaccompanied boats carry Coast Guard approved PFDs.
4. Before ever getting into a shell on the water, a rower must understand the following terminology: bow, stern, port, starboard, weigh enough, ready to row?, back, tie-in, untie, stop, the stroke, bow person, seat numbers in between and what number/seat s/he is that day. The term “stop” should be used only when talking to a specific crew in a race. When a coxswain or coach wants a crew to stop immediately, the proper term is “Weigh enough! Hold water!”
5. Each club should post a map of local waterways that includes traffic patterns and any known hazards.
6. Every club should use a logbook. Everyone on the water should sign in and out. If you are rowing without the benefit of a monitored logbook let someone know where you are

rowing and what time you should be expected in. Remember, a logbook is only useful if someone checks the book to see if there is still a boat on the water.

7. Each person is 100% responsible for the whole boat and 100% accountable for their own oar, rigging, foot stretchers, seat and slide. Check to make sure that all equipment is functioning properly before leaving the dock. If you aren't sure, ASK! Check the following:

- a. That nuts on the rigging are tight, position of your foot stretchers and the smoothness of your slide are acceptable.
- b. That the forward end of the slide is blunt and will not gouge your calves.
- c. That the persons in front and behind you have sufficient room for their complete stroke.
- d. That the heel ties on your shoes are tied with no more than 3 inches slack and in good condition.
- e. That your seat fits your body. Adjust with seat pads or a different seat.
- f. That your oar handle is properly sized.
- g. That your oarlock height is proper.
- h. That your clothing cannot become tangled in your seat or oar handle.
- i. That you have proper safety devices on board your rowing shell.

8. Make sure that you are aware of the local traffic patterns and rules on the water.

- a. Take precautions around other types of vessels to avoid collisions and be courteous with boats that have less maneuverability or ability to stop quickly.
- b. Boats shove off and approach the dock for landing while moving upstream. Familiarize yourself with the local traffic

patterns.

c. Familiarize yourself with shallow water, stumps, rocks, seasonal problems and landmarks.

d. Stay clear of bridge abutments and other man-made or natural obstacles. Do not negotiate a turn near such an obstacle.

e. The coxswain or single sculler should make frequent checks on both sides. Listen for oncoming traffic.

f. Be courteous to others on that water. Be aware of powerboats and treat them with respect.

9. The safety or coaching launch provides safety supervision when rowing and support assistance in an emergency. A launch may prove useless unless the following precautions have been taken:

a. The driver must be trained in the proper use and operation of the powerboat. Classes are offered through local chapters of the U.S. Power Squadron, or state boating safety departments.

b. A radio or cell phone is recommended to allow a quick direct link with rescue services and other coaches on the water in the event of an emergency.

c. Emergency supplies in the launch should include a first aid kit, fire extinguisher, night lights and tool kit. The tool kit should contain wrenches, appropriate nuts, tape, washers, and other materials needed to make small repairs. Only minor repairs should be done on the water.

d. Ensure that everyone in the launch is wearing a life jacket and that there is one for each person rowing under the coach's care.

e. Practice man overboard safety drills. Know how to have rowers enter the coaching launch from the water. Approach

from the leeward side, keeping the outboard propeller away from any victims. Turn off the engine as soon as contact is made. Avoid overloading.

f. The launch driver must wear the cord that activates the safety/kill switch in accordance with the motor manufacturer's literature.

10. Consult a physician before starting any form of exercise program.

11. Conditioning should be part of any rowing program.

Most people do not have perfectly balanced bodies or sufficient stamina when they begin to row. Take it upon yourself to seek professional training advice.

12. Land warm-up should become part of your training ritual.

Before rowing, get your body up to the proper intensity by taking three minutes before you touch the boat to get your body warmed up by jogging, jumping rope, or running in place. Follow that with basic stretching.

13. Water warm-up should be used to gradually build from no pressure up to full intensity. An example would be building from no pressure "hands only, bodies over,  $\frac{1}{4}$  slide,  $\frac{1}{2}$  slide,  $\frac{3}{4}$  slide, full slide", and then adding pressure until proper workout intensity is reached.

### **On the Water**

1. Proper supervision protocols must be developed and carried out to ensure the safety of the rowers. Under no circumstances should athletes who are minors be allowed or left unsupervised on the water.

2. Rowers in multi-person shells should always be quiet and attentive to the coxswain or coach.

3. Be aware of weather conditions. There are several inexpensive models of weather radios on the market. Use a

weather radio or listen to local radio weather reports before going out on the water. Watch for gathering clouds, changes in wind speed and direction, temperature changes and other boats returning home. If on a river or tidal body of water, check the current direction and look for floating objects or kelp.

- a. Do not row in whitecaps or winds of 12 knots or higher under any circumstances.
- b. If sudden winds come up, return to the boathouse if the trip is safe, or take the boat to the nearest shore and wait for the winds to calm.
- c. Try to minimize equipment damage, but remember that you are more valuable than the boat.
- d. Do not row in fog unless your visibility to shore is at least 100 yards. Be sure to have land reference points. If fog sets in while you are on the water, move slowly, and be prepared to stop quickly. Use a sound making device (coxbow, horn, or whistle) to advise other boats of your location as you take your boat to shore, following the shore back to the boathouse.
- e. Do not row in an electrical storm. Lightning detectors are inexpensive and can clip on your belt. If you are on the water and see lightning, hear thunder, or notice your hair standing on end with static electricity, head for the nearest shore. If the storm is upon you, take your boat ashore and wait for the storm to pass.

4. Waves are generated by winds, tides, currents, or wakes from passing boats. Because shells are vulnerable to high waves, specific care is needed with approaching wakes.

- a. If approaching wake is higher than the gunwale, the shell should be turned parallel to the wake to avoid having part of

the shell unsupported by the water. It is possible to split a shell under these conditions. Rowers should stop rowing and lean away from the approaching wake, with oars on the wake side lifted slightly.

b. If the wakes are lower than the gunwale and widely spaced, continue to row without a course adjustment. Deep and closely spaced wakes that are lower than the gunwale may be taken at a 90 degree angle with the bow directly toward them.

c. Turning in waves is tricky; allow plenty of room, energy and time.

5. Light conditions — The greatest danger while rowing is a collision caused by limited vision or carelessness. Great care should be taken when rowing in darkness or near-darkness. Take extra care to look and listen. Minimize conversation. Be careful not to get too close to shore or known hazards. Only row in familiar waters while rowing at dusk, dawn, or in the dark.

a. There should be an all round white light on the stern of each rowing shell when rowing between sundown and sunup. It should be visible enough to warn approaching vessels. We recommend a red (port) and green (starboard) light on the bow. Another recommendation is that reflective tape be placed on top of the gunwales and splashboards. Refer to local laws for lighting.

b. Carry a sound making device.

6. Water temperature should always be monitored.

Hyperthermia occurs when there is an increase in body temperature, usually when the air temperature is above 76 degrees, and the victim is exposed to sun and heat in combination with a decrease in fluids. It may occur when a)

sweat cannot easily evaporate; b) the body is being heated by the environment; c) water loss from sweat and respiration is not replaced and dehydration occurs. Two serious conditions may result:

Heat exhaustion – signs are throbbing headache, nausea, cool skin, chills, sweaty, and pale pulse. Action – drink water, shade from sun, and treat for shock.

Heat Stroke is life threatening – signs are behavior changes, unconsciousness, hot but not sweaty, flushed warm skin and rapid pulse. Action- douse with cool water, shade from sun, fan, ensure the airway is open, always get medical assistance as soon as possible.

**To avoid these problems in hot and humid weather:**

- a. Maintain a high fluid level. Drink water before leaving the dock and frequently while on the water. Take an individual plastic water bottle for easy access.
- b. Avoid sunburn by using sunscreen, with a sweatband or hat to keep lotion out of eyes.
- c. Wear light clothing.
- d. Remain in the shade when off the water.
- e. Plan activity level consistent with the degree of heat and humidity.

Hypothermia occurs when a victim is subject to cold temperatures, cold water, ice or snow. There is potential danger for hypothermia when the water temperature is below 80 degrees and very dangerous when the water temperature is below 50 degrees. Symptoms include feeling cold, turn bluish and shivering, and followed by numbness, apathy, lethargy, disorientation and loss of mental capacity.

**Action if cold and shivering:**

- a. Get out of the water quickly, even on top of the capsized

boat. Heat loss is 25 times greater when in the water.

b. Huddle with others

c. Drown-proofing (dead man's float) is not an acceptable survival technique. Keep as much of the body out of the water as possible.

d. Move to shelter quickly, remove wet clothing and re-warm body. In mild hypothermia conditions, re-warm in a shower, tub or with warm blankets.

e. Do not give any liquids to drink, treat for shock.

f. Continue to re-warm and always obtain medical assistance as soon as possible.

**Action if cold and shivering has stopped:**

a. Treat as above but DO NOT RE-WARM EXTREMITIES! If victim is no longer shivering, the torso must be re-warmed to avoid circulation of cold blood to the heart. This can kill. Wrap the victim in a warm blanket and apply heat to under arms and groin area; wrap again in a separate blanket. Wrap each arm and leg separately to prevent rapid re-circulation of blood to the heart. Hot packs should not be placed directly on the victim, a thin layer should be used to protect the victim from burning. If possible place the victim in a sleeping bag with a warm person.

b. Administer artificial respiration and CPR if necessary. Always obtain medical assistance as soon as possible.

Cold water immersion — Be aware that in very cold water people have survived as long as one hour underwater.

Recover a victim immediately and even though there may be no sign of life, administer CPR efforts until medical assistance is obtained.

**Emergency Conditions**

1. Under no circumstances should a rower in the water leave

his/her shell. Even if a swamped boat is within a swim able distance from the shore, the rower should swim the boat to the shore. So do not leave your flotation even if you consider yourself a strong swimmer.

2. Should someone give the command ““weigh enough! Hold water,” don’t ask questions, just respond immediately by stopping all forward body movement. Square the blades in the water and bring the boat to a halt.

3. Use these distress signals to communicate to other boats: wave the arms or a shirt above your head or raise one oar in the air.

4. Man overboard – Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!” If the safety launch can get to the victim first, allow the launch to rescue the victim. If the launch is not in the immediate vicinity, back the shell to the victim and have him/her hang onto the shell until the launch arrives.

Another rower may have to enter the water to assist if the victim is injured.

5. Rower injured – Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!” Signal launch if first aid is needed.

6. Shell damaged but afloat and not taking on water – Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!” Make adjustments or signal launch for assistance.

7. Shell swamped – Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!”. A shell is swamped when the interior water reaches the gunwales. If your shell has sealed compartments under each rowers bench it will stay afloat and the rowers should stay in the shell. If the rowers are in a boat without sealed compartments (older boats) the flotation ends may cause the boat to break apart, in that case the rowers should follow the procedures listed below.

- a. Coxswain directs rowers to untie, and by seat number rowers should carefully, but quickly, slip overboard.
  - b. If the boat is taking on excessive water, signal the launch and unload rowers by pairs – starting in the middle of the boat – as soon as possible in order to avoid damage to the boat. Pairs should form “buddies” and keep watch of each other. The cox should buddy with the stern pair.
  - c. If rescue is not imminent, take the following steps: 1) Remove oars and place them parallel to the shell. All persons should move to the two ends of the shell. It is dangerous to roll a shell when near riggers. 2) Then roll the boat to form a more stable flotation platform so rowers can either lie on top of the hull or buddies can hold onto each other across the hull. 3) Remember that body heat loss occurs 25 times faster in the water. Do not attempt to roll the boat if rescue is on the way.
  - d. A launch can shuttle rowers to the nearest shore. Be careful not to overload the launch.
  - e. When the boat has been brought to the shore, remove the oars. If the ends of the shell have filled with water, they must be drained before the boat can be removed from the water. Lift the shell carefully to avoid injury or damage. A boat full of water is very heavy, so try bailing first, then roll the boat slowly and lift it from the water.
8. Singles should be rowed with a buddy boat or launch. Your buddies boat or the launch will help stabilize you for the re-entry. Entering the shell directly from the water may cause splashboard damage. Swim the boat to shore, lying in the stern, using the shell as a paddleboard. In very cold weather you can abandon your shell and lie on the stern deck of your buddy’s boat to be taken to shore. The loss of

muscle control can occur very quickly and dramatically in cold water. The stern deck rescue may be your only option.

9. Shell capsized – Immediate command “untie!” This rarely happens except in small boats. Be sure that all rowers and cox are accounted for. Stay with the boat until assistance arrives.

10. Shell broken and sinking – Immediate command “untie!” Get out of the boat and follow the same procedures as for a swamped shell. Do not leave the floating boat. Swim boat to shore if launch is not immediate.

11. Another boat in distress – If a distress signal is seen and insufficient assistance is near that craft, maneuver your shell to the distressed shell. Assist in any way that does not jeopardize the lives in your shell.

12. Shells should stay within hailing distance of their safety launch. The launch has been outfitted to provide assistance to rowers and/or their shell in the event that it is needed.

Most frequently, the toolbox and coach’s expertise is available for small equipment adjustments or breakdowns, which allow the shell to continue rowing after a short stop. If more serious needs arise, the launch is there for rapid transportation.

13. Paddle-down at the end of your workout. It is important to your health that you don’t race up to the dock. Once the boat and oars are stored, it is important to take another few minutes to go through your basic stretching exercises to identify unnoticed sprains or strains that began during your row.

### **Summary**

As a coach, you expect 100% from your athletes. They in turn expect the same from you. They expect you to be the

best coach possible. To be the best you have to have your priorities in order. Safety should be at the top of your list.