

Safety Guidelines for Water Practices & Emergencies

Appendix D in the “Corvallis Rowing Club Rules, Policies & Procedures” manual (2019)

General information, responsibilities, & good habits

Each person is fully responsible for the whole boat and fully 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.

Before each erg workout in the barn, the club does a warm-up piece followed by some basic stretching as part of a healthy training ritual. Likewise, for water practices everyone is expected to arrive on time and be fully prepared for vigorous physical activity in the boat. This should include warming up, stretching, and having water available onboard for hydration during workout pieces.

Everyone is responsible for reading and studying the *Coxswain Instruction* document, since all rowers with CRC must take turns coxing. When there is an emergency in the boat, **the cox is responsible to give appropriate commands on behalf of crew and equipment safety**, but all rowers need to be aware of the recommended practices for emergencies and should be prepared to follow thru with the procedures discussed in this document.

Willamette River traffic pattern from the OSU docks, boats shove off and approach the dock for landing while moving in the upstream direction. Therefore, our local traffic pattern is opposite from other waterways. Boats move on the Willamette (around the vicinity of the crew docks) in a clockwise manner. This facilitates boats being able to launch and land with bows pointed in the upstream direction.

Weather

Cold weather. The combination of high water and low air temperatures in the winter often result in conditions that can result in hypothermia or frostbite for rowers. Immersion in near freezing water can be fatal in less than 5 minutes. Coaches and rowers should exercise caution during the winter and early spring when the danger of hypothermia and frostbite is highest. This includes keeping boats closer together, carrying the proper safety equipment (see below) and not taking chances. Coaches and rowers are encouraged to learn the effects and warning signs of hypothermia and to practice emergency treatment when necessary. *[Excerpted from <http://www.qrcrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/QRC-membership.pdf>]*

Hot weather. Training and racing often occur at the hottest time of the year and thus rowers are at risk for heat related injuries. Coaches, coxswains and rowers should be prepared to evaluate the potential risks and to take appropriate precautions. The most important prevention strategy is heat acclimatization. Heat acclimatization and heat tolerance are different for individuals. Adequate hydration is critical for heat tolerance and part of a successful acclimatization to warm climates. The base fluid need of athletes is 32 ounces/day and increases with exercise time (16 ounces/hour) and air temperatures (16 ounces/ per 9 °F temperature increase above 77 °F). Rowers are advised to bring extra water. If a rower does not bring water, the coaches will decide if that person will be allowed to row. UV sunscreen and appropriate clothing (fabrics that minimize heat storage and enhance sweat evaporation) should be used. *[Adapted: http://www.worldrowing.com/mm/Document/General/General/10/89/73/Heat,_Heat_stroke_and_safety_for_FIS_A_updated_03.12.11__English.pdf]*

Visibility

Fog. A minimum of 600 feet of unrestricted visibility must be available before crews or scullers may begin rowing on the river in foggy conditions. Coaches are responsible for determining that there is enough visibility to conduct a practice. Extra care should be exercised in the presence of any fog. Rowers caught on the river during a sudden fog should proceed with extreme caution. Crews should stop often to look for other crews or scullers and the shoreline. Stopping and listening in a fog is often more effective than looking when trying to locate other rowers. *[Adapted: <http://www.qrcrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/QRC-membership.pdf>]*

Lighting during practices in the fall when light is decreasing at the end of Tues/Thurs practices. Inadequate lighting on a shell is an invitation to disaster. It is important that lights be used so crews can see each other and so motorboats can see us. Shell and coaching launches must have lights. A bright flashing strobe light is also recommended. Lights should be visible at all times when turned on. *[Adapted: <http://www.qrcrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/QRC-membership.pdf>]*

Obstacles or powerboat wakes

Should the coach or coxswain urgently give the command “**Way ‘nuff! Hold water!**”, do NOT ask questions, just respond immediately by stopping all forward body movement, square the blades in the water, and quickly bring the boat to a halt. This action is likely the result of approaching an object (snag, shore, another boat, etc.). On our Willamette, the cox should be cognizant of the ever-present river current. No boat will ever actually stop and stay in that one place - it will continue to drift with the speed of the current. Therefore, there will probably need to be another quick adjustment after an emergency stop. Immediately check your course, then clearly and decisively move the crew out of danger.

Although illegal, there may be a speeding motor boat that comes fairly close to a rowing shell. If the approaching boat-wake that is higher than the gunwale, coxswains should try to maneuver the shell such that it is parallel to the wake - this avoids having part of the shell unsupported by the water (since it is possible to split a shell under these conditions). On the coxswain’s command, rowers should stop rowing and lean away from the approaching wake, with oars on the wake-side lifted slightly.

Rower overboard

If a rower goes overboard, the immediate command is “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. If the water is cold, it is critical to get the rower out of the water and back to a warm area as soon as possible. Rowers should be aware that victims of hypothermia may lose reasoning abilities without being aware of it.

Under no circumstances should a rower in the water leave his/her shell. Even if a swamped or flipped boat is within a swimmable distance from the shore, the rower(s) should swim the boat to the shore. Therefore, do not leave your shell even if you consider yourself a strong swimmer.

Boat sinking or flipped

Rowing shells have been designed for flotation, but they are not the same as a Personal Flotation Device (PFD); they are considered an “emergency flotation device”. Oars are neither personal nor emergency flotation devices.

A shell is swamped when the interior water reaches the gunwales. If rowers stay in the boat, the flotation ends of the boat may cause the boat to break apart in the middle.

If a shell is gradually taking on excessive water for some reason, immediately STOP the boat (“Weigh enough! Hold water!”). The cox should command rowers to “Untie” and signal for the launch so the crew can unload by pairs (starting in the middle of the boat) as soon as possible for crew safety and to avoid damage to the boat. Pairs should form “buddies” and keep watch of each other. The cox should buddy with the stern pair.

If a shell is broken and sinking quickly or has already become swamped, the immediate action is to STOP the boat and have rowers “Untie!” The cox should direct the rowers by seat numbers (starting in the middle of the boat) to carefully and quickly slip overboard. Do not leave the floating boat. Swim boat to shore if the launch is not immediate.

If a shell should unexpectedly flip over, the urgent command or action is to “Untie!” Then immediately ensure that all rowers and the cox are accounted for and uninjured. Stay with the boat until assistance arrives.

Generally, if rescue is not imminent, take the following steps once rowers are in the water:

- **Step 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 rowers are near the riggers.

Step 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.

Please refer to the “Corvallis Rowing Club Rule, Policies & Procedures” manual for other important information.