

ROWING CANADA AVIRON SAFETY GUIDELINES

Introduction

Rowing is a safe sport when conducted with due consideration for the risks inherently associated with any outdoor water sport. There is the risk of personal injury from collision and the risk of drowning when rowing participants find themselves in the water. All risks are heightened in cold water. While contending with difficult weather conditions is part of the sport, safe enjoyment of the sport is the aim. Concern for personal safety must be paramount. Each club is responsible for assessing the risks in its particular environment and in establishing the appropriate safety procedures to minimize those risks. Nothing in this document in any way limits an individual's responsibility for assessing his or her personal skills and for the outcome of his or her decisions and actions.

Each member of Rowing Canada Aviron is responsible for knowing and adhering to the Transport Canada regulations, especially those applicable to rowing – see Appendix.

In all cases of accident involving injury or property damage, the RCA National Office shall be notified in writing immediately by an officer of the club. This is a contractual obligation under RCA's liability insurance policy covering all registered clubs and members. See "Insurance Claims" in the Policies & Guidelines on the RCA web site.

Safety for regattas is set out in the RCA Rules of Racing and RCA Sanction Form. Arrangements must be made to meet those safety requirements in order to obtain sanction to hold the regatta.

This Guideline is set out under the following headings:

- Safety Advisor
- Local Safety Code
- Emergency Communication
- Hazards
- Safety Equipment and Safe Equipment
- Risk Management
- Operations
- Cold Weather/Water and Hypothermia
- Hot weather and Hyperthermia
- Off-site Rowing (touring and training camps)

Safety Advisor

Every club should appoint a member as a safety advisor whose duty is to ensure that an appropriate safety program is drawn up and implemented at the club in accordance with the guidance provided in this Guideline.

Local Safety Code

Since conditions vary from club to club, each club should draw up and display a Local Safety Code, covering such matters as the following.

- A plan of the local water showing the traffic circulation pattern, local rules of river/water use, hazards and safe landing sites in the event of an emergency.
- Circumstances in which there must be a safety boat attending any rowers.
- Equipment that a safety boat is required to carry.
- Equipment that a rowing shell must carry either when accompanied by a safety boat or not (if the latter is permitted).
- Responsibilities of rowers, scullers, coaches and coxswains. These can include checking the safe condition of equipment before taking it on the water, familiarity with the local water use rules and procedures on the water such as remaining within a certain distance of the safety boat.
- Procedures in the event of a rower ending up in the water.
- Weather conditions under which rowers should not venture on the water such as high wind, poor visibility and ice conditions.
- Cold water rules.
- Competency requirements of safety boat operators.
- Guidelines relating to rowing before sunrise and prior to sunset.
- Boathouse rules.
- Use of a rower's out/in logbook.

Guidance on these and other safety matters is set out in the following paragraphs.

Emergency Communication

A list of vital telephone numbers should be displayed prominently in every clubhouse to include:

- Doctor/Ambulance/Police
- Fire Department
- Local hospital casualty department
- Local, river or harbour police
- The emergency service that can provide the quickest on-water response

If there is no telephone readily available at the clubhouse, clear directions to the nearest available telephone must also be displayed.

The possible need for emergency communication from the water should also be considered, whether by two-way radio or by cellular phone.



Hazards

- Hazards can include swift currents, spring run-offs, bridges, weirs, shoals, deadheads, rocky shores or steep walls or banks that make getting out of the water difficult or impossible in an emergency, and recreational and commercial traffic including float planes.
- Attention should also be drawn to any variation in normal procedures that may be necessary due to the state of the tide or stream, high wind, or other climatic conditions. It is intended that local codes of practice will emphasize that safety is paramount.

Safety Equipment and Safe Equipment

- Safety and first aid equipment should be readily available in every clubhouse to include:
 - *First aid chest (to be fully stocked and regularly checked)
 - *Thermal blankets/exposure bags
 - *Life rings/buoy and line
 - *Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's)
- Clubs should ensure that all equipment used for rowing and coaching is safe and maintained in good order. Every rowing shell must have:
 - *a white ball of not less than 4cm diameter made of rubber or material of similar consistency on its bow, unless the construction or nature of the boat is such that the bow is properly protected or its shape does not represent a hazard.
 - *heel restraints to allow 'hands-free' release of feet
 - *'quick release' mechanisms that are in effective working order in all boats equipped with fitted shoes
 - *lights as required by Transport Canada when rowing in reduced light
- Coach/safety boats. In practice the coach boat is also frequently the safety boat. Any coach boat on the water can provide a measure of safety, but the term safety boat is used in this Guideline to indicate that the boat has designated "safety" duties, such as remaining within a certain distance of the rowers it is accompanying, and must carry specific safety equipment, even if it is also acting as a coach boat.
- Coach/safety boats should be equipped with safety equipment in accordance with Coast Guard rules as well as such items as a medical kit, thermal blanket and hand pump.
- Coach/safety boats should provide for easy entry from the water (e.g. step, ladder, or handhold). Where motors are equipped with a kill switch, the kill switch must be attached to the operator.
- Coach/safety boats and their engines should be properly maintained since failure, particularly at a critical time, could have serious consequences.



Risk Management

An important risk management process that applies to all aspects of rowing operations is to ask ‘what if...’ a certain situation arises - what might the consequences be and how can such consequences be prevented or their effect mitigated? This is often described as having hindsight in advance. Where the consequences could be serious, even if the likelihood of the situation arising is considered remote, the situation should be avoided or precautions taken to be able to mitigate the consequences.

A vital component of assessing the possible consequences of a situation or incident and of taking appropriate avoidance measures or precautions is the coldness of the water. Submersion in cold water is extremely dangerous, causing a swimmer to lose heat far more rapidly than exposure to cold air. Depending on the coldness of the water loss of muscle function and mental confusion can occur within minutes. See the paragraphs below on Cold Weather and Water.

Operations

- Motorboat drivers must be competent to control the boat so that it does not become a danger to the rowers or others, and must comply with the Transport Canada Operator Competency certificate requirements.
- Rowing before posted sunrise and after posted sunset is discouraged, particularly where there are other vessels using the waters at those times, and should not be practiced without bright navigational lights and an accompanying safety boat. An additional risk is posed by rowing after sunset as an incident such as capsizing has to be dealt with in darkening conditions.
- Coaches are responsible for those in their charge and should ensure that they are informed of safety procedures and abide by them. Coaches should be aware of the forecast weather and should evaluate the environmental conditions before deciding, in light of the rowers’ capabilities and limitations, whether it is safe for rowers to go out on the water (see also RCA’s Weather Protocol)
- Clubs should provide adequate instruction in waterman ship and rowing technique, plus adequate supervision by coaches and experienced rowers, to ensure that no person boating from the club puts himself or herself at risk when on the water. This applies particularly to single scullers and to juniors. Inexperienced coxswains should be allowed out in boats only if accompanied by an experienced coach in a fully equipped coach boat and they should also abide by the navigation rules and local traffic patterns. All active members should learn and practice capsize and accident drills.
- Clubs should treat the coaching of coxswains and their education in waterman ship and good safety procedures as being as important as coaching rowers. Coxswains should receive a full education in handling the boat, safety procedures and boat handling. Inexperienced coxswains should be allowed out in boats only if observed by an experienced coach preferably in a fully equipped coach boat. They should also abide by the navigation rules.
- Rowers should be able to swim 50m in light clothing and be sufficiently at ease in the water not to panic and to be able to keep themselves afloat. If a person cannot meet



this requirement for physical or other reasons, an approved PFD should be worn when on the water.

- All vents on rowing shells should be closed when on the water to preserve their inherent buoyancy.
- In case of accident, rowers should be instructed to stay with the boat rather than attempt to swim to safety, however strong a swimmer a rower may be. The boat, unless seriously damaged, can be considered a life raft. If the water is cold rowers should be instructed to get as much of their body out of the water as possible by draping themselves over the upturned hull, if necessary turning the boat over for this purpose. Rowers should also be instructed to “buddy-up”, two holding on to each other until rescued to provide mutual support and to help ensure that all are accounted for.
- Coxswains should wear a PFD at all times when on the water, as should coach and safety boat drivers and their passengers. In bow coxed boats, the worn PFD must allow easy and unrestricted escape from the boat.
- Clubs should take active steps to encourage members to become fully conversant with lifesaving and resuscitation procedures, by attending training courses and other appropriate means. In particular it is highly desirable that the Club Safety Advisor and all regular club coaches should be so trained.
- Club rowing activities should be coordinated with those of other local water users to minimize clashes of interest and the possibility of additional water hazards arising.
- A logbook can be used to log rowers out and in, particularly when they are allowed to row unsupervised.

Cold Weather and Water

Preparation and prevention are essential in protecting against the effects of the cold-water environment.

- All persons should wear protective clothing appropriate for the conditions and their activity, and as far as possible commensurate with the needs of the rowing motion and activity, with the objective being to keep the body dry and to insulate against heat loss.
- When the water temperature is at 10 degrees Celsius or below, or otherwise when the environmental conditions may warrant, special safety precautions, proposed by the club safety officer, should be considered. Possibilities for additional safety precautions include:
 - * allowing members to go out on the water, where appropriate, only if attended by a safety craft carrying a PFD of appropriate size for all individuals being attended.
 - * not allowing members to go out on the water

Hypothermia: a discussion of the causes, effects, prevention and treatment of hypothermia is included in the Rowing Canada Aviron’s NCCP Level 1 Coaching Manual.



Hot weather

As with cold weather, preparation and prevention are important in protecting against the effects of heat.

- All persons should wear protective clothing appropriate for the conditions and their activity
- Use of sun block with a high SPF factor.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exposure to hot weather
- Address any symptoms of heat stress immediately.

Heat injury: a discussion of the causes, effects, prevention and treatment of heat injury is included in Rowing Canada Aviron's NCCP Level 1 Coaching Manual.

Off-site Rowing (touring and training camps)

If a club conducts rowing activity at a location away from the club premises, the same safety issues set out in this Guideline need to be addressed afresh.

- An adequate number of coaches should accompany the rowers to provide supervision and meet any safety needs.
- Information should be obtained about local water conditions and hazards, traffic patterns, vital telephone numbers and local safety and rescue arrangements in the case of accident.
- If the camp or tour is using the facilities of a rowing club, this information should be readily available and should be studied. Local rowing equipment, coach/safety boats and safety and first aid equipment should also be assessed for its condition and adequacy.
- If the camp or tour is at a location remote from a rowing club, this information should be obtained from local residents and from a visual inspection before rowers take to the water. In addition, the club should bring or obtain its own safety and first aid equipment to address its safety needs such as personal flotation devices, medical supplies and safety boats.
- Particular care must be taken about weather and water conditions when rowing on unfamiliar water.
- It is prudent for all participants in camps and tours taking place outside their province or outside Canada to obtain travel medical insurance coverage.
- Participants in tours should consult the RCA Touring Manual for more information



APPENDIX

CANADIAN COAST GUARD SAFETY NOTICE

Transport Canada's Regulations For Rowing Shells

SAFETY EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Unless exempted as described below, rowing shells are required to carry:

- one-Canadian-approved personal flotation device (PFD) or lifejackets of appropriate size for each person on board;
- one sound signaling device;
- navigation lights that meet the applicable standards set out in the Collision Regulations if the pleasure craft is operated after sunset and before sunrise or in periods of restricted visibility.

EXEMPTION

A rowing shell is not required to carry personal protection equipment, boat safety equipment and distress equipment if:

- it is attended by a safety craft carrying a personal flotation device (PFD) or lifejacket of appropriate size for each member of the crew of the largest vessel being attended (in addition to its own safety equipment) or;
- the rowing shell carries a PFD or lifejacket of appropriate size for each member of the crew, a sound signaling device and, if it is operated before sunrise or after sunset, a watertight flashlight or;
- if it is competing or training during a provincially, nationally or internationally sanctioned regatta or competition or is engaged in training at the venue at which such a regatta or competition is taking place.

