



**ROWING AUSTRALIA**

**ON-WATER SAFETY GUIDELINES**

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**- A Practical Guide for Rowing Clubs in Australia**



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## **ROWING AUSTRALIA ON-WATER SAFETY GUIDELINES**

### ***- A Practical Guide for Rowing Clubs in Australia***

#### **INTRODUCTION**

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Rowing is a safe and enjoyable sport - if the risks inherent to any activity conducted on, or within the vicinity of water, are effectively understood and addressed.

Rowing Australia's Safety Guidelines seek to ensure that personal safety is paramount and that local codes of practice and rules are upheld. In an effort to provide Australian Rowing Clubs with practical hands on resources, a Safety Assessment Checklist has been created to be used in conjunction with these safety guidelines and to assist in reviewing and developing safety procedures both on and off the water. They should also be viewed in conjunction with safety and other procedures developed by state and territory associations.

In many States, regulations regarding the safe navigation of rowing boats on waterways are governed by State or even International Maritime Laws. This document seeks to complement those regulations and where those regulations are not evident in particular States, provide National guidance.

#### **VISION**

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Rowing Australia is dedicated to promoting and communicating best practices for safety both on and off the water to ensure the well being for all participants and their surrounding communities.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

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- Develop best practices for safety on a national level with emphasis towards a national on-water code of conduct for rowing in Australia
- Provide practical and simple resources and guidelines to aid clubs in their assessment and development of adequate safety procedures

#### **STRATEGIES**

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- Keep apprised of national and international rowing best practices in safety
- Communicate any revisions of the safety guidelines and resource material through bulletins
- Ensure all resource materials provide simple and practical guidelines without creating additional burdens on club administrators whilst maximising the safety benefits for all participants.
- Coordinate the creation of a State 'Safety Officer' in each state or territory association, to facilitate the inventory and appraisal of the safety procedures of clubs located within their state.
- Seek feedback from the clubs and general membership when evaluating and revising the benefits and effectiveness of the guidelines and supporting resources.



## LOCAL SAFETY CODE

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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 waterway showing the traffic circulation pattern, local rules of river/water use, hazards and safe landing sites in the event of an emergency.
- Use of a rower's out/in logbook.
- 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).
- List of responsibilities of rowers, 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 or motor boat capsizing.
- Weather conditions in which rowers should **not** go on the water, (eg; high wind or poor visibility).
- Cold weather and water.
- Competency requirements of coach/safety boat operators.
- Guidelines relating to rowing before sunrise and prior to sunset.
- Boatshed rules.

## SAFETY OFFICER

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Every club has the responsibility to appoint a member as a Safety Officer whose duty is to coordinate the implementation of an appropriate safety program in accordance with local water safety guidelines, the RA 'On-water Code of Conduct' and the recommendations provided within these Guidelines.

The Safety Officer should:

- Know what constitutes an incident or 'near incident' and why and how to report them.
- Keep the members informed of incidents and 'near incidents' by ensuring a current list of incidents (no names), together with action points, are prominently displayed to promote member awareness.
- Monitor regularly the RA Incident Reporting System and communicate to the club and committee the results and actions taken.
- Advise the Club Committee/Board on the results of the data reviewed at regular intervals to determine strategies to prevent or reduce the likelihood of a reoccurrence.
- Ensure the reporting of all incidents and 'near incidents' to the State Safety Officer and local marine authorities if required under the local waterway safety procedures.
- Ensure an Annual Safety Audit is conducted and delivered on time to the State Safety Officer.

*The position of 'Club Captain' is potentially the ideal designation for undertaking this role.*

## MONITORING

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***'Safety Is No Accident'*** – RA Needs your Assistance to Reduce the Risk to Rowers in Australia

Safety shouldn't be a process left to trial and error, as a rowing community we need to educate and learn from each other's incidents and 'near incidents' - even near misses provide important learning points. A simple method to assist on a national scale is through **Incident Reporting**.

Incident Reporting Procedures:

- Clubs must ensure that all members have access to and are educated and trained in their individual responsibilities to report incidents using the Club's 'Incident Reporting Logbook' as a means of helping to develop safe practices.
- RA defines an on-water incident or 'near incident' as an event causing or involving:
  - the loss of a person from a boat
  - the death of, or grievous bodily harm to, a person caused by a boat's operations
  - the loss or presumed loss or abandonment of a boat
  - a collision with a boat
  - the stranding of a boat
  - material damage to a boat
  - material damage caused by a boat's operations
  - danger to a person caused by a boat's operations
  - danger of serious damage to a boat
  - danger of serious damage to a structure caused by a boat's operations
- An incident and 'near incident' are to be recorded in a club's 'Incident Reporting Logbook' and reported directly to the Club Safety Officer. It is the Club Safety Officers' responsibility to ensure this information is forwarded to the State Safety Officer and local marine authorities if required under the local waterway safety procedures. Note; primary responsibility is to report serious safety incidents to local police or maritime authorities.
- RA will collate and publish all information reported by the State Safety Officers to keep all clubs apprised of incidents and near incidents, in an effort to encourage clubs to utilize the statistics provided in developing safer practices.

## CONFIRMING IT ACTUALLY OCCURS – SAFETY AUDITING

Auditing the level of safe practice and *acting on the findings is essential* if clubs are to fulfil their duty of care. RA's Safety Checklist was designed to cover the basic aspects of club and training camp safety.

If the Safety Checklist is to be of any benefit to your club and particularly your members, it must be an honest account of current practices. The rationale behind the Safety Checklist is to recognise areas of good practice while also identifying potential areas needing attention. The information provided through the Safety Checklist will enable your State Safety Officer to discuss the club's safety plan with the Club Safety Officer in addition to the information provided from other clubs via RA's safety reporting system.



## **SAFETY GUIDELINES**

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Emergency Communication

Hazards

Safety Equipment and Safe Equipment

Risk Management

Operations

Cold Weather/Water and Hypothermia

Hot Weather and Hyperthermia

Off-site Rowing

### **Emergency Communication**

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A list of vital telephone numbers should be displayed prominently in every boatshed and inside every coach/safety boat 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 boatshed, 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 mobile phone.

### **Hazards**

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- Hazards can include swift currents, storm water 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 sea 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**

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- Safety and first aid equipment should be readily available in every boatshed to include:
  - First aid chest (to be fully stocked and regularly checked)
  - Thermal blankets/exposure bags
  - Life rings/buoy and line
  - Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) - for all rowers and accompanying safety boat operators and passengers, on the water at a given time
  - Adequate number of functional 'bow lights' for rowing boats

### Safety equipment - continued

- 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 maritime law (see section below)
- 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 these Guidelines 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 are to be equipped with safety equipment in accordance with the local rules of the waterway and on-water code of conduct as well as such emergency items as a medical kit, spare lights (for coach/safety boat and rowing boats), 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.
- Club vehicle(s) and trailer(s) should be regularly serviced, particularly prior to long journeys. Subject to local road regulations RA recommends that where loads overhang past the back of the trailer a brightly coloured warning marker/flag of at least 300mm<sup>2</sup> is attached at the farthest point from the trailer. At night a red light visible to at least 200m must be fitted.

### Bow and Stern lights

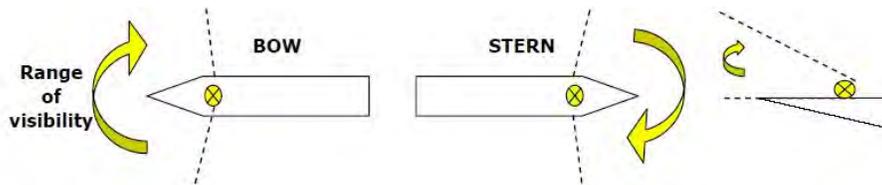
Rowers and Clubs should pay close attention to State rules governing the use of navigation lights on boats – or bow lights as they are generally referred to. These State rules may over-ride the recommendations outlined below.

In general, International Regulations for Preventing Collisions At Sea (in relation to vessels under oars) require rowing boats, in restricted visibility and between sunset and sunrise, to exhibit;

- Two all-round white lights, one attached to the boat at or near the forward or bow end, and one attached to the boat at or near the stern end.
- A continuous white light is considered acceptable if it is visible in clear conditions from a distance of 1 kilometre.
- A flashing white light is considered acceptable if it flashes at least once per second and is visible in clear conditions from a distance of 1 kilometre.
- Notwithstanding the above it is considered acceptable for a light to be masked so as not to interfere with the vision of the vessel's occupants, provided at least one light is visible from any direction (see diagram below).

The use of safety lights is required in the following conditions:

- Periods of low visibility, such as during heavy rain or periods of fog
- Periods of low light, including heavily overcast skies
- Period of time prior to and in the immediate time after sunrise & sunset.



### Clothing

Rowers are also encouraged to make a serious effort to wear clothing that is reflective to increase visibility

### Risk Management

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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, the impact of such consequences 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 Club must ensure they have adequate insurance including Public Liability Insurance cover and "Member to Member" extension. In addition Clubs must ensure all their activities and business are declared on the policy schedule. This may include such things as corporate days, a canoe section or section racing under a different name, letting out the premises for functions, running an open day or competition, etc.. The test on any point of cover is, "Has a premium been paid on the activity or situation?" A situation may include parents who are non-members acting as helpers, but taking it upon themselves to act outside the direct control of a coach for example.

### Safe Operations

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- 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 local marine recreational boat licensing requirements.
- Rowing before posted sunrise and after posted sunset can be dangerous, particularly where there are powered vessels using the waters at those times and should not be practiced without complying navigational lights. For individual scullers, consideration should also be given to the need for an accompanying safety boat or at very least, training together with other scullers. 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. Coaches should ensure that they are informed of safety procedures and abide by them. Coaches should be aware of the weather forecast 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.
- Consideration should be given to utilising a log book and logging rowers out particularly where they are allowed to row unsupervised. Alternatively, boat racking should be closely scrutinised so that there is a high awareness of boats that have not returned
- You should not row where there is a small boat alert, where there are high winds causing whitecaps or where it would put you into the path of an active storm cell or lightning.

- Clubs should provide adequate instruction in watermanship 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 capsizing and accident drills.
- Clubs should treat the coaching of coxswains and their education in watermanship 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 must also abide by the local 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. This is particularly relevant for beginners and adaptive athletes with minimal leg and trunk use.
- 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. 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.

### **Cold Weather and Water**

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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.
  - Or in extreme weather, not allowing members to go out on the water

**Swamping in Cold water**

- If your boat is swamped, stay with the boat. The boat and oars should still float. Keep as much of your body out of the water as possible. You should not generally try to swim ashore even if you are a good swimmer. This is because of your exposure to other boat traffic and, in cold water conditions, you may not be able to swim as far as you would otherwise expect.
- If you cannot right the boat, lay on top of it until help arrives. You can use your feet to kick while holding onto the boat, and move yourself closer to the shore. Try to use as little movement as possible in cold weather, as you will lose heat and energy very quickly if you move around too much.

**Cold Induced Conditions:**

<p><b>Hypothermia</b></p> <p>▪ <b>Signs and Symptoms:</b></p> <p><i>When body temperature falls, early warning signs include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ feeling cold</li> <li>▪ shivering</li> <li>▪ clumsiness and slurred speech</li> <li>▪ apathy and irrational behaviour</li> <li>▪ heart rate may slow</li> </ul>	<p><b>Hypothermia</b></p> <p>▪ <b>Treatment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess for environmental dangers and proceed if safe to determine whether the casualty has any life- threatening conditions and if any immediate first aid is necessary.</li> <li>▪ Remove casualty to warm, dry place</li> <li>▪ Protect casualty and yourself from wind, rain, sleet, cold and wet ground.</li> <li>▪ Avoid excess activity or movement.</li> <li>▪ Maintain casualty in horizontal position.</li> <li>▪ Remove wet clothing.</li> <li>▪ Warm casualty:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Place between blankets or in a sleeping bag, and wrap in thermal blanket or similar</li> <li>- Cover the head to maintain body heat.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Give warm drinks if conscious:</li> <li>▪ Do not give alcohol</li> </ul>
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*The above course of action for the assessment and treatment of Hypothermia is presented on the St John Ambulance Australia website. This information is not a substitute for first aid training. St John Ambulance Australia and Rowing Australia recommend that everyone is trained in first aid.*

## 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 (including hats and 'sun smart' clothing)
- 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 Induced Conditions:

#### **Heat Exhaustion**

##### ▪ **Signs and Symptoms:**

- feeling hot, exhausted and weak
- persistent headache
- thirst and nausea
- giddiness and faintness
- fatigue
- rapid breathing and shortness of breath
- pale, cool, clammy skin
- rapid, weak pulse

##### ▪ **Treatment:**

- Lie casualty down:
  - move casualty to lie down in a cool place with circulating air
- Loosen tight clothing:
  - remove unnecessary garments
- Sponge with cold water
- Give fluids to drink
- Seek medical aid:
  - if casualty vomits
  - if casualty does not recover promptly

#### **Heatstroke**

##### ▪ **Signs and Symptoms:**

- high body temperature
- flushed skin
- irritability and mental confusion may progress to seizures and unconsciousness
- dizziness and visual disturbances
- headache, nausea and/or vomiting

##### ▪ **Treatment:**

- Apply cold pack or ice:
  - apply to neck, groin and armpits
- Cover with wet sheet
- Call 000 for an ambulance.
- If casualty fully conscious, give fluids

#### **WARNING**

**Heatstroke is potentially a lethal condition**

*The above course of action for the assessment and treatment of Hypothermia is presented on the St John Ambulance Australia website. This information is not a substitute for first aid training. St John Ambulance Australia and Rowing Australia recommend that everyone is trained in first aid.*



### **Off-Site Rowing (Training Camps, Touring, Coastal Rowing, etc.)**

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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.

- Coaching staff should familiarise themselves with new water conditions and training routes
- 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 own safety needs such as personal flotation devices, bow lights, 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 Australia to obtain travel medical insurance coverage.

### ***Appendix A - Rowing Australia's Safety Assessment Checklist***

### ***Appendix B - On-Water Code of Conduct for Rowing in Australia***