

Royal Chester Rowing Club – Water Safety Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy is written to provide members with the information necessary to ensure that Royal Chester Rowing Club (the Club) operates at all times in a safe manner. Primarily the Club will conform to the requirements of the British Rowing Water Safety Code, with which all members are encouraged to familiarise themselves, but the Club will also take such further measures as relevant to the local conditions.

The water on which the Club rows, the River Dee, is actively used by powered pleasure boats of all shapes and sizes including very large fare paying passenger boats, self drive motor boats, hired rowing boats, canoeists and sailing boats and occasionally swimmers, and particular attention must be paid to the potential hazards arising from this situation and to the by-laws made by Chester City Council.

1.2 Members must also be aware that conditions at regattas held on water other than the River Dee will frequently include hazards not present on the River Dee. Some rivers may have a strong tidal stream enhancing or opposing the current. There may be, for example, weirs close to the rowing water e.g Lancaster Regatta, bridge piers in the river which can create eddy current around them and even shipping as at Merseyside Regatta and Head.

1.3 A subsidiary objective of the safety policy is to minimise damage to Club equipment. Collisions are likely to result in damage to the boats and oars involved even if none of the rowers are injured.

1.4 Nothing in this policy limits in any way the individual's responsibility for the outcome of his/her own actions. All Club members are responsible for their own safety and for the safety of other Club members. Members have a responsibility to notify the committee of any medical condition that may affect them during exercise.

1.5 All members should be made aware of the existence of the Safety Policy and encouraged to make themselves familiar with its content. It should be published on the Club web site and paper copies should be available for any members who do not have convenient access to the internet.

2. Safety Adviser

2.1 The Club Water Safety Adviser shall be appointed or re-appointed at the first Committee Meeting after the Annual General Meeting each year.

2.2 The Safety Adviser's responsibilities are listed in paragraph 2.1.1 of the British Rowing Water Safety Code. He/she is expected to be fully conversant with the requirements of the British Rowing Water Safety Code and the Club Safety Policy and to advise the Club on action necessary to ensure compliance.

2.3 The Safety Adviser will also ensure that whenever a risk assessment identifies local risks or hazards a Safety Plan is formulated and displayed prominently at the Club and that appropriate actions are defined. The Safety Adviser will ensure that those affected by the Safety Plan know what actions are to be taken and by whom.

3. Rules for Safety

3.1 The Club Rules for (Water) Safety summarise the essentials of correct behaviour while handling a rowing boat. The Rules for Safety shall be reviewed and approved by the Committee each year.

The Committee may also amend the Rules for Safety at any time in response to changed circumstances. They shall be published as an appendix to the Club Rules and each newly elected member shall be provided with a copy. They are also appended to this policy (Appendix 1).

3.2 All members (except Social Members who may not use the boats) must be able to swim at least 100 metres in light clothing. Applicants for membership must so affirm on their application form. Applicants for Junior membership must provide a signed statement from their parents or guardian that they are able to do so and may be required to demonstrate their ability to the satisfaction of the Club Safety Adviser or the Junior Co-ordinator.

3.3 Junior members (all members below the age of 18 years) will be required to undertake a capsize drill at a local swimming baths, or other suitable location, when arranged by the Club.

3.4 Voluntary swimming in the River Dee is strongly discouraged.

4. Equipment

4.1 Scullers and rowers must always check their equipment before they boat to ensure that there are no loose or missing parts and particularly that:

- 4.1.1 The boat has a bow ball
- 4.1.2 The heel restraints are secure
- 4.1.3 The riggers and gates are tightly fitted to the boat
- 4.1.4 All hatches are closed
- 4.1.5 The steering is working properly
- 4.1.6 The stretcher(s) is/are securely fixed

4.2 If a member feels that any item of equipment is unsafe, they should notify the Club captain or the Water Safety Adviser as soon as possible. If a member is unsure of their competence to make these checks they should ask for the advice of a senior member of the Club.

4.3 Boats, should be washed after use to help ensure their continuing safe condition.

4.4 Coxless boats are primarily for the use of experienced crews. Novices may only use coxless boats with the permission of the Captain or other member of the captaincy team.

5. Equipment Damage and Accident Reporting

5.1 In the event of any accident, collision or capsize or any serious incident involving injury to persons or damage to equipment a report MUST be made to British Rowing, using the online Incident Reporting tool. Details should also be entered in the incident logbook, which is kept behind the bar.

5.2 The Water Safety Adviser will ensure that copies of all Incident Report Forms are sent to the Regional Safety Adviser and British Rowing. Copies must also be retained in the Club for at least four years.

5.3 The Safety Adviser will also make an annual summary report of all recordable and reportable incidents, sending copies to the Regional Safety Adviser and British Rowing.

5.4 Equipment or components must not be removed from one boat to remedy a deficiency or damage in another. Doing so merely transfers the problem to the other boat where it may be discovered unexpectedly and cause an even greater problem.

6. Use of the Water

6.1 Circulation pattern

6.1.1 The basic circulation pattern on river is anti-clockwise. This follows from the keep to the right rule. When travelling upstream keep closely to the Meadows side. When returning downstream keep close to the City bank.

6.1.2 On returning to the club proceed downstream past the club to the Suspension Bridge; then turn and proceed upstream on the Meadows side until the Boathouse Inn and then move across to the pontoon when it is free. If the pontoon is occupied stay stationary on the meadows side until the pontoon is free and it is safe to cross the river back to the Club. This pattern is illustrated on the poster on the wall inside the entrance to the Boatshed

6.1.3 Different circulation patterns may be specified for special events such as Chester Regatta or the North of England Head of The River Race. These will be published diagrammatically and displayed in the boathouse. They apply only to the day of the event for which they are designed.

6.1.4 Notwithstanding the required circulation pattern, which is intended to keep crews apart from one another, crews must always keep well away from moving commercial traffic

6.2 Lifejackets

6.2.1 All coxswains, launch drivers and launch crew members must wear lifejackets or buoyancy aids while on the water. These may be borrowed from the rack in the boathouse and must be returned to the rack after use.

6.4.2 Coxes of bow loader boats should not wear life jackets that inflate on contact with water or, in the event of a capsize, the cox may become trapped in the upturned boat.

6.4.3 When working with participants whose safety is also the responsibility of the Local Education Authority or other relevant body, the Club will comply with any additional safety measures required by that body.

6.4.4 All lifejackets and buoyancy aids should be checked regularly and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

6.5 Adverse conditions

6.5.1 When rough water caused by strong wind makes it doubtful whether it is safe to row, the coach(es) or the Club captain will make a decision as to the extent to which rowing is permissible. Their decision will be final. Novices should not normally be allowed to row in adverse conditions but special consideration may be given to the experience and level of competence of a crew.

6.5.2 In cold weather and after dark this decision must be taken with particular caution. See sections 7 and 8 below. General guidelines for taking this decision are given in Appendix 4.

6.5.3 In borderline conditions permission to row may be given but with the conditions that all Juniors remain in sight of the boathouse and that single scullers do not go out alone but only in the company of another boat.

7. Rowing in the Dark

7.1 The expressions "in the dark" and "after dark" refer to the period between sunset and sunrise.

7.2 The British Rowing Water Safety Code draws attention to the additional hazards of rowing or sculling in the dark or in poor visibility. However, it is recognised that competitive crews need to row on weekdays as well as at the weekend and during the winter it may only be possible to do so by rowing after dark. Crews may be permitted to row after dark on the following conditions.

7.2.1 Crews wishing to row after dark must obtain the advance permission of the captain. This permission will not be given to coxless boats, scullers or beginners except as detailed below in Appendix 3 paragraph 1. It will be required that all crews are coxed by experienced coxes authorised by the Committee to cox after dark.

7.2.2 J16 or younger Juniors may not row in the dark and older Juniors (J17 and J18) may do so only as members of a crew in which the majority of rowers are Seniors.

7.2.3 After dark only two crews will be allowed on the water at the same time and each crew must be accompanied by a safety launch crewed by an authorised helmsman and one other person. One of these should be the coach.

7.2.4 The coach has an underlying responsibility for the safety of his/her crews and, together with the captain if he/she is present, will take the decision as to whether it is safe to row after dark on any particular occasion. Coaches should familiarise themselves with their responsibilities as detailed in section 2.5.4 of the British Rowing Water Safety Code.

7.2.5 After dark all boats must display white lights visible through 360 degrees. Rowing boats will carry two white lights, one on the bow canvas and one on the stern canvas, and launches will carry one white light on a mast.

7.2.6 A detailed procedure for rowing after dark is given in Appendix 3. This procedure will be posted in the boathouse.

7.3 A crew boating at or near to sunset should carry the white lights required for rowing in the dark (see paragraph 7.2.5) even though it may not yet be dark.

8. Cold Weather

8.1 In cold weather, especially during the winter months, the risk of becoming chilled to the point of hypothermia because of wearing insufficient clothing or because of inexperienced crews not exercising vigorously enough to generate sufficient body heat is a real danger. Sufficient thin layers of appropriate clothing to retain body heat should always be worn. In windy or wet conditions the outer layer should be wind and waterproof. Coxes especially should be well protected and their clothing should include a hat and gloves.

8.2 The hazard posed by rough water is greatly increased by cold conditions. To fall in or to be swamped and wet through on a warm summer day may be not unpleasant. On a cold winter day it may be extremely dangerous. Therefore, the decision as to whether rough conditions make it unsafe to row (see paragraph 6.5 above) must be taken with much greater caution in cold weather.

8.3 Younger and lighter people are more liable to hypothermia than bigger adults. No Junior members must be allowed to boat unless they are adequately clothed for the prevailing conditions.

8.4 The symptoms and signs of hypothermia are listed in Appendix 2. This list is taken from the British Rowing Water Safety Code, where guidance on the treatment of hypothermia is also given.

9. Coaching/Safety Launches

9.1 Club launches may be driven only by persons authorised by the Committee to do so.

9.2 The Club will conduct or arrange teaching courses and tests for those needing to become authorised drivers.

9.3 Launch drivers should carry a Club mobile phone pre-programmed (speed dial) with the Club telephone number and the numbers of any other launch drivers.

9.4 During Junior rowing sessions the Club will ensure that a safety launch with a designated driver is on the water and ready for immediate use.

9.5 Launches shall carry the following safety aids: paddle, bailer, throw line, thermal exposure blankets, basic first aid kit and sound signalling device. After dark they shall also carry a powerful torch.

10. Stage

10.1 The deck of the floating stage will be inspected weekly by the Safety Adviser or the Captain. If there is any indication that the surface is becoming slippery it will be cleaned to restore the slip resistant properties.

10.2 The buoyancy of the stage will be included in the weekly inspection to confirm that the stage is still floating level with the correct freeboard. Any necessary adjustments will be made or repairs arranged for.

11. Fire

11.1 In the event of fire all persons must leave the building by the nearest exit. Green signs with a running man indicate exits. Do not stop to collect personal possessions.

11.3 Fire extinguishers are located throughout the boathouse.

11.4 The Safety Adviser will test the alarm system not less frequently than once a month and will record the test in the Fire Safety Book.

Appendix 1

Rules for Water Safety

General

1 Non-swimmers may not go out in boats, excepting when wearing a suitable Personal Flotation Device or Lifejacket.

2. When going against tide or current keep close into the bank.

3. When going with tide or current keep clear of all craft coming in the opposite direction.

4. When leaving the stage look in both directions.

5. Keep clear of all racing and power boats and sailing craft.

6. Do not cross in front of oncoming vessels or boats.

7. If there is a stream go well clear of bridges before turning.

8. Do not change places in a boat while afloat.

9. If your boat sinks or capsizes HOLD ON TO IT UNTIL HELP COMES. If help does not come, swim WITH IT to the bank.

10. Extreme caution must be observed when boating in adverse weather conditions.

11. All scullers must obtain permission to use a sculling boat from an officer. Novice scullers must always be supervised until passed as proficient.

12. If another boat is on a collision course with you or another boat, shout "AHEAD SCULLER/FOUR/...!"

13. It is important for rowers, especially Juniors, to wear sufficient clothing. Crews who appear to be inadequately dressed should be prevented from boating.

Local

1. Keep to the right of the river at all times. (The right is the cox's right, that is, bow side/starboard side of the boat.)

2. You may not be on the water earlier than half an hour before sunrise or later than half an hour after sunset except on the conditions detailed in paragraph 7 and Appendix 3.

3. Do not attempt to race the passenger boats or to row through heavy wash or swell. Be sure you know what to do if a passing vessel has left a big swell. Racing shells have a very high aspect ratio and, contrary to usual boat handling practice, should take a swell beam (side) on; by keeping the blades pressed out and on the water and, holding the boat level, they can ride over the swell. Tub pairs and Ahoy sculling boats can comfortably take a swell bows on, although in a big swell water will break over the riggers. Launches should take a swell bows on.

4. There are indicator boards along the river bank which signify access points for the emergency services; they can also be used to advise the Club where you are in the event of an accident or emergency so please familiarise yourself with them.

8. The last key holder to leave the Club should, before locking up, check that all the boats are in place on the racks and no-one is still out on the water.

Appendix 2

Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the whole of the body has been chilled to a much lower than normal temperature and can no longer maintain its heat, that is, a temperature lower than 35 deg. C.

1 Symptoms and signs of hypothermia

The following are the most usual symptoms and signs, but may not all be present:

- a) Unexpected and unreasonable behaviour possibly accompanied by complaints of coldness and tiredness.
- b) Physical and mental lethargy with failure to understand questions or orders.
- c) Slurring of speech.
- d) Violent outburst of unexpected energy and violent language, becoming uncooperative.
- e) Failure of, or abnormality in, vision.
- f) Twitching.
- g) Lack of control of limbs, unsteadiness and complaining of numbness and cramp.
- h) General shock with pallor and blueness of lips and nails
- i) Slow weak pulse, wheezing and coughing.

Appendix 3

Procedure for Rowing in the Dark

(For the purpose of this procedure 'in the dark' or 'after dark' means during the period between sunset and sunrise.)

1. No boats may row or continue to row after dark without the advance permission of the Captain. This permission will not be given to coxless boats, scullers or beginners except only that the Committee may, at the request of the Captain, give permission for a specific crew of named experienced rowers to take a coxless boat out after dark if they are accompanied by a launch dedicated to that particular coxless boat.

2. The Water Safety Adviser will post the times of sunrise and sunset on a notice board.

3. No J16 or younger Junior may row after dark. J17 or J18 Juniors may only row after dark as members of a crew in which the majority of rowers are Seniors.

4. Only experienced coxes authorised by the Committee may take boats out after dark; no J16 coxes (or younger coxes) may do so.

5. Immediately before boating after dark the lights on the boat must be checked to ensure that they are working correctly.

6. The coach has an underlying responsibility for the safety of the outing and he/she, together with the captain, will take the decision as to whether it is safe to row after dark on any particular occasion. In calm conditions, a safety launch should sweep the intended rowing area to look for and remove any floating objects that may present a hazard.

7. After dark, not more than two boats may be on the water at the same time and each boat must be accompanied by a safety launch crewed by an authorised driver.

8. After dark all boats must display white lights visible through 360 degrees. Rowing boats will have two lights, one on the bow canvas and one on the stern, and launches will have one light on the bow and red lights on the rear

9. All crew members and coxes boating after dark should wear high visibility waistcoats over their rowing kit.

10. The circulation pattern must be strictly adhered to.

11. After dark safety launches must carry a powerful torch in addition to the standard safety equipment and mobile phones pre-programmed (speed dial) with the Club telephone number and the number of any other launch driver.

12. While boats are on the water after dark an experienced person must remain at the boathouse as a contact in case of emergency.

A copy of this procedure should be posted on an appropriate notice board.

Appendix 4

Safe rowing in adverse conditions

Before every outing the coach(es) and/or the Club captain and/or the Water Safety Advisor will make a decision as to whether or not it is safe to row on that occasion. **Their decision will be final.**

The decision should always be taken with caution and should err on the side of safety. The following factors should be considered when making the decision.

▣ The strength of the wind. As a rough guide, if the waves are showing white caps it is too rough for a useful outing and is probably too rough for safety.

▣ The temperature. Any accident will be much more dangerous in cold weather.

Wind conditions in which a decision to allow rowing might be taken in warm weather should be more likely to result in a decision to not row in cold weather. Juniors, Beginners and Novices should generally not be allowed to boat if the temperature is at or below 36° F and falling.

Similarly, rowing when there is ice on the river may lead to damage to club equipment and should not be allowed. The risk of hypothermia from anyone falling in is enormous.

▣ Rain. Significant rain might be tolerable in the summer but intolerable in the winter when it will greatly increase the risk of hypothermia.

▣ Poor visibility. Darkness is a special case. The Club policy on rowing after dark is given in Section 7 and a detailed procedure is given in Appendix 3.

This policy should also be considered when visibility is reduced because of fog or other reasons.

▣ The age of the crew. Young people are more vulnerable to adverse conditions than adults and should not be allowed to row in conditions that an adult crew might find acceptable.

▣ The experience of the crew. Beginners should not be allowed to row in adverse conditions.

▣ The boats to be used. For example, eights might be allowed to row in conditions in which single scullers would not be allowed.

▣ The area to be used. In borderline conditions permission to row may be given with the proviso that the boats do not go out of sight of the boathouse.