

**THE MILWAUKEE ROWING CLUB**  
**SAFETY RULES**  
**April 2009**

**1. General.**

- 1.1 These rules establish a minimum safety standard.
- 1.2 All Club members are required to follow them and expected to make an effort to promote safe and responsible rowing.
- 1.3 Club assumes no responsibility, either express or implied, for the personal safety or welfare of any person. These rules are made to teach and help members and their guests in being responsible for their own safety. You are responsible to correctly assess your ability to row safely under the existing weather, river, and traffic conditions any time you go out on the water in a boat launched from the MRC dock.

**2. Athlete Prerequisites.** Prior to rowing, each cox and rower must:

- 2.1 Complete and submit a waiver.
- 2.2 Pass a swim test (Junior and undergraduate rowers) or verify swimming proficiency (adults).
- 2.3 View the US Rowing safety video.
- 2.4 Attend a safety talk presented by a certified Club coach.
- 2.5 Prior to sculling in a single, a novice sculler or new club member must satisfy the requirements of the Club sculling evaluation.
- 2.6 A Personal Flotation Device (PFD) must be present in each recreational single scull: Julien, Alden, Little River, Maas.

**3. Weather Conditions.**

- 3.1 Check the weather forecast each time prior to rowing to make sure severe weather is not imminent. .
- 3.2 Rain: Severe rain can result in strong, fast, unpredictable currents, and large amounts of dangerous debris in the water for several days after the rain has stopped. .Do not row in a downpour or in the event of horizontal rain.
- 3.3 Wind: High winds can be dangerous and cause problems with boat control, or cause waves that might swamp the boat. Do not row if winds are 20 mph or greater. Do not assume that conditions are safe if winds are less than 20 mph; use your best judgment based on current, gusts, etc.

- 3.4 Thunder and Lightning:
  - 3.4.1 NEVER launch a boat when there is a possibility of lightning or you hear thunder. Rowers must wait 30 minutes after thunder and lightning completely stops before launching a boat or walking on the metal ramp.
  - 3.4.2 If lightning is sighted while you are already on the water, you must return to the Boathouse IMMEDIATELY and wait for conditions to clear. Proceed as cautiously as possible to return quickly to the dock.
- 3.5 Fog: Do not row in fog.
- 3.6 Cold Temperatures: In early spring/late fall, even when the temperature is above freezing, frost/ice may be present on the ramps and the docks making them treacherous.
- 3.7 A specified group of individuals will each have the authority to independently make a binding “DO NOT ROW” determination at anytime. Such determination will be posted at the Boathouse and on the website when appropriate.

#### **4. Log Book Procedures.**

- 4.1 Prior to going out the following must be logged:
  - 4.1.1 Name.
  - 4.1.2 Boat.
  - 4.1.3 Time out.
  - 4.1.4 Expected return.
  - 4.1.5 For coxed boats, designate in the log book where the boat will be practicing.
- 4.2 After returning:
  - 4.2.1 The return time must be logged.
  - 4.2.2 Note in the log’s comments section if the boat flipped or if there was an accident/incident.
  - 4.2.3 Log any boat damage or missing parts.

#### **5. General Rules of the River.**

- 5.1 The GREATEST DANGER in the Milwaukee estuary is COLLISION:
  - 5.1.1 Rowing boat with another rowing boat.
  - 5.1.2 Rowing boat with a bridge, floater, wildlife, buoy, or dock.

- 5.1.3 Rowing boat with another vessel.
- 5.1.4 Before going out, review the logbook to see what other boats are out and where they are likely to be located.
- 5.2 IF there is a boat approaching the dock to land, don't proceed down the ramp to launch your boat unless there is sufficient space for the boat that is landing. Landing boats have priority.
- 5.3 LOOK AROUND frequently at least every 10 strokes if in a boat without coxswain, or if you are a cox.
- 5.4 KEEP YOUR EARS OPEN. If you hear someone shouting, it can mean something is wrong – be prepared to stop and check it out.
- 5.5 Encounters with other boats:
  - 5.5.1 When rowing boats meet, all boats must be prepared to stop and proceed with caution.
  - 5.5.2 When encountering a blind boat, the coxed boat must hail the other vessel loud enough to be heard (rowers should not sit silent when the cox has not seen a boat or hazard).
  - 5.5.3 No boat (including blind boats) has a right of way.
  - 5.5.4 Shut down full pressure rowing in the middle of any piece until it is clear that all danger of collision is past - especially with non-rowing boats which are not likely to follow any traffic pattern.
  - 5.5.5 When passing through bridges, a cox should be talking so that if another boat doesn't see you, it will hear you.
  - 5.5.6 Each cox must wear a whistle in the boat to be used as a signal for others. Each cox is to provide his/her own whistle. Whistles are for emergency use only.
- 5.6 Use of launches during boat training sessions:
  - 5.6.1 Novice and Junior - no more than 2 sweep boats per launch.
  - 5.6.2 Varsity - no more than 3 sweep boats per launch.
  - 5.6.3 A launch must be present at all times when a Junior or collegiate sweep or sculling boat is on the water.
- 5.7 Traffic rules:
  - 5.7.1 Imagine that the river is a road with a center lane marker stripe. In general, Club members should row so the boat and oars stay on the starboard side of the river center line. Starboard is defined by in the

direction the boat is traveling. When approaching other boats move to starboard (in the direction you are traveling). Similar to the traffic pattern on a two way road in the US. Boats should *never* proceed on the wrong side of the river unless directed to do so by a coach or race official, or under emergency circumstances to avoid a collision with another vessel.

- 5.7.2 Do not hug the shoreline. You cannot be seen and you will hit obstacles (shore, shallow rocks, trees, debris lodged in the river bottom, piling and piers).
- 5.7.3 No right of way for any boat (NOTE: no right of way is the rule at all times– no boat should assume that others will yield).
- 5.7.4 Boats should never stop in the river positioned perpendicular to the shore. When stopped for any reason, boats must maintain an orientation parallel to shore.
- 5.7.5 All boats must maintain a safe stopping distance with other boats.
- 5.8 Specific areas and their hazards:
  - 5.8.1 Humboldt Avenue Bridge: No rower may proceed upstream beyond the Humboldt Avenue bridge (the first bridge upstream from the Boathouse).
  - 5.8.2 On the Menomonee River: All boats should proceed with caution to avoid the area near the submerged barge, located just west of the I-94/I-43 bridges.
  - 5.8.3 No novices may row in the Outer Harbor.
  - 5.8.4 Inner Harbor, Milwaukee River, and Menomonee River: Watch for the tug moving coal barges to and from the power plant.

## **6. River Hazards.**

- 6.1 Strong/Fast Current: During spring, or after heavy rain, the river may have a deceptively fast current. Coaches, scullers, and coxswains should allow for additional stopping distance prior to any bridge or other hazards. In these conditions, boats headed upstream should be prepared to yield way to oncoming traffic that may be unable to stop safely. Note that boats moving with the current must take extra measures to avoid being pushed into other boats or obstacles.
- 6.2 Buoys: These do get moved sometimes, especially in the spring and fall, so don't assume their location. They come up on you quickly as you move downstream, especially when the current is strong.
- 6.3 Bridges: Go through the center opening - not the sides. Never turn a boat around near, under, or immediately upriver of a bridge. The current can push a turning

boat into a bridge piling, so make sure you are far enough away or down river of a bridge before turning. This is especially a problem during strong current conditions.

- 6.4 Floating Debris: Things like picnic tables, logs, and branches of varying size can cause considerable damage. They sometimes float just under the surface of the water, so coaches, scullers, rowers, and coxswains need to pay considerable attention to spotting them and steering clear. Debris tends to be more prevalent after rain.
- 6.5 Deadheads: Deadheads are what happens when a free-floating log becomes mired in the riverbed, usually with one end pointing up toward (and sometimes through) the surface of the water. These can be very difficult to see and extremely damaging to boats. They can also occur almost anywhere in the river - near shore or in the middle of the channel. Coaches, scullers, rowers, and coxswains need to watch closely for them.
- 6.6 Other Watercraft: We share the river with motor boats, canoes, ships tugboats, and barges. Legally, motor boats are required to decrease speed so as to cause a minimum wake when coming upon rowers. This doesn't always happen. Stop rowing if necessary to wait for a motor boat and wake to go by. Never argue with any fisherman, pleasure boats, or other motorized craft on the river. All incidents must be reported directly to a Club officer.
- 6.7 Tugboats, barges and ships: They cannot stop. *Stay away from them*. Do not go behind them, the propeller creates turbulence in the water that is dangerous. Do not go into the south inner harbor if you see one moving there. ANY time is barge time – they move along the river at all times of day and night. Barges travel up and down the main channel of the river. If you see one, do not panic, just move to one side of the river as quickly as possible. You may sometimes need to cross to the wrong side of the river to temporarily get out of the way of a barge. Make sure you also watch out for other boats when doing so. Point your boat so that it is parallel to any wake and wait for the barge to pass.
- 6.8 Construction barges and equipment: *Stay away from them*. Do not assume that you know where they are positioned – they are moved frequently.
7. **Low Light Rowing**. Before morning civil twilight or after evening civil twilight, the following additional rules must be observed
  - 7.1 “Civil Twilight” is a point in time that occurs in the morning and again in the evening. It can be predicted for clear weather conditions similarly to sunrise and sunset. In the morning before the beginning of civil twilight and in the evening after the end of civil twilight artificial illumination is normally required to carry on ordinary outdoor activities. The US Naval observatory publishes charts showing civil twilight times.
  - 7.2 No boat with any rower or a cox who has less than the equivalent of two months of rowing experience (an "inexperienced rower or cox"), may launch before

morning civil twilight. All boats with an inexperienced rower or cox must be off the water prior to evening civil twilight.

7.3 Schedule:

7.3.1 Prior to rowing, ascertain the exact time of civil twilight for that particular day at the US Naval Observatory website:  
<http://aa.usno.navy.mil> – a civil twilight chart will be posted in the Boathouse for the months of September, October, April, May and June.

7.3.2 Each day that both collegiate programs are on the water, they must coordinate plans prior to launch to minimize the possibility of collision or conflict in the area between the St. Paul Avenue and Wells Street bridges.

7.3.3 All crews must plan to return to the dock after civil twilight in the morning. This avoids two-way traffic between the St. Paul Avenue Bridge and the dock.

7.4 Clothing: Each rower, cox and coach must wear a bright colored shirt that will improve the ability of others to see the person rowing. Acceptable colors include white, bright yellow, safety fluorescent green, or safety fluorescent yellow. Athletic grey, green, black, red or blue are unacceptable; these colors blend into the shoreline and camouflage the crew.

7.5 Lights:

7.5.1 Lights must be used on all boats rowing in the dark before morning civil twilight and for at least ½ hour after morning civil twilight.

7.5.2 Lights must be used on all boats for at least ½ hour before civil twilight and after if out rowing after sunset.

7.5.3 Launches must comply with Wisconsin DNR regulations for display of lights.

7.5.4 Flashing lights must be placed on the stern and the bow of each rowing boat.

7.5.5 Flashing lights should also be affixed to the clothing of the persons sitting closest to the bow and closest to the stern.

7.5.6 The cox should wear a headlight backwards on his/her head.

7.5.7 The Club will designate specific brands and types of lights which may be used on a boat and on the clothing of those in a boat. Only Club-approved lights may be used.

7.5.8 All responsibility for financing, acquiring, maintaining, and using lights on boats and launches will be with the program, rowers, or coaches

using the boats and launches in pre/post civil twilight rowing. No Club funds will be used to pay any expense related to any such lights.

7.6 Low Light Rules of the River:

- 7.6.1 No right of way for any boat (NOTE: no right of way is the rule at all times– no boat should assume that others will yield).
- 7.6.2 One launch per 2 Junior or collegiate boats. No such boat may include an inexperienced rower or cox.
- 7.6.3 Above the St. Paul Avenue Bridge, coxed eights may only row with six or fewer rowers at a time.
- 7.6.4 No boat may row higher than 22 strokes per minute.
- 7.6.5 No timed pieces north of the St. Paul Avenue Bridge.
- 7.6.6 All boats must maintain a safe stopping distance from other boats.
- 7.6.7 Single file and no passing another boat headed in the same direction (that is, no leaving the right side of the river) north of the St. Paul Avenue Bridge.
- 7.6.8 Before going through a bridge, the cox is to shout out to make boats on the other side aware of his or her boat's presence.
- 7.6.9 All boats must paddle (that is, no pressure) through the Pleasant, McKinley, Wells, Wisconsin Avenue, Michigan, Clybourn and St. Paul Avenue Bridges.
- 7.6.10 Each boat must be prepared to stop before going through Wisconsin Avenue Bridge.

7.7 Enforcement:

- 7.7.1 In the event of a Safety Rule violation that results in any damage to any shell beyond fin replacement prior to or after civil twilight, the penalty assessed will be one level higher than would have otherwise been levied.
- 7.7.2 Any touching between any Club shell or launches and any other boat, bridge, or dock must be reported in writing within 2 hours to specified members of the Club Board and Safety Committee.
- 7.7.3 Upon any collision requiring more than first aid, all low light rowing is automatically suspended until further notice.

**8. Coach Certification.** Each coach must provide evidence of the satisfactory completion of the following prior to coaching:

- 8.1 Thorough familiarity with the Club Safety Rules.

- 8.2 Swim test.
- 8.3 US Rowing Safety Video.
- 8.4 Launch training.
- 8.5 Coaching techniques.
- 8.6 Waiver on file with the Club.
- 8.7 CPR/First Aid Certification (to be obtained by current coaches as soon as possible after the beginning of the fall season and thereafter, a new coach must have this certification prior to coaching).
- 8.8 Level I US Rowing Coaches' Clinic (preferred, but not mandatory).

**9. Launches.**

- 9.1 A launch must be present at all times when a Junior or collegiate sweep or sculling boat is on the water.
- 9.2 Equipment required to be carried in each launch while in use:
  - 9.2.1 Launch key with specified Club Board/Safety Committee members' numbers printed on an attached plastic card.
  - 9.2.2 Whistle and/or megaphone (each coach is to provide his/her own).
  - 9.2.3 Canoe paddle.
  - 9.2.4 Motor cutoff lanyard attached to the launch driver.
  - 9.2.5 Throwable PFD with a lifeline.
  - 9.2.6 PFDs to be worn by each person in the launch.
  - 9.2.7 Coaches are to carry a cell phone and specified Club Board/Safety Committee members numbers programmed into the phone.
  - 9.2.8 Boat registration.
- 9.3 Recommended for each launch:
  - 9.3.1 List of cell phone numbers for other coaches on the water at the same time.
  - 9.3.2 Extra PFDs.
  - 9.3.3 First aid kit
  - 9.3.4 Flashlight (bright, waterproof, with fresh batteries).
- 9.4 Launches per sweep boats:



9.4.1 Novice and Junior - no more than 2 boats per launch.

9.4.2 Varsity - no more than 3 boats per launch.

## **10. Accident Response.**

10.1 Immediately call 911 to get a response team to the scene as soon as possible if:

10.1.1 Someone who is injured requires treatment beyond first aid.

10.1.2 Someone is at risk for hypothermia during a practice session.

10.2 If a boat capsizes or is involved in a collision:

10.2.1 Count heads.

10.2.2 Respond to any rower in distress.

10.2.3 Get rowers as far out of the water as possible either onto a launch or onto a shell.

10.2.4 Move the group to a riverwalk or dock (rarely more than 75 feet to the river side) and get them out of the water – coaches and rowers should know the river and know where ladders and exit points are.

10.2.5 Follow procedures for righting a shell and getting back into the boat.

10.2.6 Damaged/unrowable shells: secure the shell by a rigger and return later to retrieve it.

10.3 In the event of a “*non-trivial*” accident (collision, damage to the boat, rower in the water, injury requiring treatment beyond first aid, EMT personnel called to the scene, etc.):

10.3.1 After the immediate danger is over, the accident must be reported as soon as possible to the appropriate specified Club representative.

10.3.2 Within two hours, the coach (or in the event of an uncoached boat, the cox or designated rower) must submit a written report to the specified members of the Club Board and Safety Committee.

10.3.3 The Safety Committee is to conduct an investigation of the accident, determine whether penalties should be recommended and assess whether policies and procedures should be revised.

## **11. Miscellaneous.**

11.1 No unsupervised Juniors or undergraduates may be on dock/stairs/Boathouse area.

11.2 No uncoxed rowing in sweep boats for Juniors or undergraduates.

11.3 No Swimming from MRC facilities.

## **12. Health.**

- 12.1 Scrub the dock upon arriving at the boathouse to remove all bird droppings, dead fish, and other debris. Besides the potential transmission of disease or bacteria, these items can increase the slip hazard. Scrub the dock with brooms and lots of water to thoroughly remove all traces of bird droppings. If the surface of the plastic dock has a slight green hue, keep washing– do not just spread a fine layer of bacteria laden fecal matter around the surface.
- 12.2 Do not place oars or any other equipment on the dock before all bird droppings have been thoroughly cleaned off with a broom and water.
- 12.3 Water from any river or lake may contain bacteria or other water-borne pathogens. Be careful and avoid ingesting water that may splash on your face while rowing. Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with hands while rowing. Wash hands with soap as soon as possible after rowing.
- 12.4 Wash open cuts, abrasions, peeling blisters, and other sores on your body with antiseptic soap after rowing.
- 12.5 Wash oars and boat with Simple Green after each use.
- 12.6 Clean Erg handles and seats with disinfectant after each use.

## **13. Penalties and Enforcement.**

- 13.1 Penalties are graduated based on the severity of the violation and the number of violations committed.
- 13.2 Penalty levels include
  - 13.2.1 Safety-training.
  - 13.2.2 Suspension of rowing privileges for a specified period (individuals or entire program).
  - 13.2.3 Suspension of all club privileges for a specified period of time (individual or entire program).
  - 13.2.4 Termination of membership and permanent loss of privileges to access Club facilities and equipment (individuals or entire program).
- 13.3 A violation of these safety rules is a serious infraction.
- 13.4 In the event of a Safety Rule violation that results in any damage to any shell beyond fin replacement prior to morning or after evening civil twilight, the penalty assessed will be one level higher than would have otherwise been levied.