

Merrimack River Rowing Association

Rules and Safety Guidelines April 11, 2006

INTRODUCTION

The rules and guidelines of the Merrimack River Rowing Association are presented to facilitate the safety and enjoyment of recreational and competitive rowing. Combining good judgment and common sense on the water and on land can prevent accidents and minimize equipment damage. Together we can maintain a safe environment in which to row. Rowers must follow the MRRA safety guidelines at all times. Rowers, coxswains and coaches must familiarize themselves with this manual.

Revisions to this document may be issued periodically and members will be notified.

SAFETY

GENERAL

- a) The protection of personal health and well being is of primary importance and should never, under any circumstances, be sacrificed or jeopardized in any way. Equipment should only be used for its intended purposes, not abused or mistreated, and rowers should always strive to protect equipment from damage and neglect. Any damaged equipment should be tagged as damaged and logged in the damaged equipment log book. (see MRRA Boat policies appendix a)

- b) These rules govern all MRRA members and guests participating in rowing and club activities.

- c) Failure to comply with these rules may result in complete or partial loss of membership privileges, without refund of dues or the like, or any part thereof. Ultimate rules enforcement lies with the Board of Directors.

- d) MRRA rowing users must be either:
 - ?? Members in good standing of the MRRA.
 - ?? Participants in programs authorized by the MRRA.
 - ?? Invited guests of a MRRA member. (Note: A guest may row as a MRRA member 2-3 times as specified by the MRRA Boat policies, #4 see appendix a)
 - ?? Other qualified persons who receive permission to use MRRA equipment
 - ?? These rules apply to all users including, but not limited to, rowers, coaches, coxswains and launch operators.

BEFORE THE ROW

1. All rowers and coxswains must satisfy the requirements of the MRRA swimming test as described on the MRRA swimming certification form. Alternative safety systems maybe

used at the discretion of the rowing and safety captains and Board of Directors for adaptive rowing and universal access participants provided their safety is not compromised and appropriate support and safety systems are in place.

2. Annually, the USRA Safety Video "Ready all, Row!" must be viewed in its entirety to complete the safety requirement for rowing membership.
3. Know that your shell has been designed for floatation. Your boat is not a Personal Floatation Device (PFD); it is an emergency floatation device. Please note that oars are not considered floatation devices.
4. Rowing can be a strenuous exercise and each rower should take personal responsibility for their own physical condition, health and safety. Rowers should consult a physician before starting any form of exercise. Before beginning each rowing session each person should go through a land based stretching/warm up regime. Conditioning should be part of any rowing program. Take it upon yourself to prepare properly for the sport of rowing.
5. Staying hydrated is important in any weather and no rower should launch without their own water /sports bottle.
6. Rowers must understand the following terminology: bow, stern, port, starboard, weigh enough, ready to row?, back, tie-in, untie, stop, the stroke, bow person, seat numbers in between and what number/seat s/he is that day. The term "stop" should be used only when talking to a specific crew in a race. When a coxswain or coach wants a crew to stop immediately, the proper term is "Weigh enough! Hold water!"
7. Every club member should be familiar with and use the log book (refer to MRRRA boat policies appendix a). Anyone using an MRRRA motor launch or engine must sign equipment out and then in before and after each use.
8. Each rower is responsible for themselves and the boat. They are also accountable for how their oar(s), rigging, foot stretchers, seat and slide function. Check to make sure that all equipment is functioning properly before leaving the dock. If you aren't sure, ASK!
Check the following:
 - a. That nuts on the rigging are tight, position of your foot stretchers and the smoothness of your slide are acceptable.
 - b. That the forward end of the slide is blunt and will not gouge your blades.
 - c. That the persons in front and behind you have sufficient room for their complete stroke.
 - d. That the heel ties on your shoes are tied and in good condition.
 - e. That your seat fits your body. Adjust with seat pads or a different seat.
 - f. That your oar handle is properly sized.
 - g. That your oarlock height is proper.
 - h. That your clothing cannot become tangled in your seat or oar handle.
 - i. That you have proper safety devices on board, if warranted in your rowing shell.
9. A map of the Merrimack River, from Tyngsboro to the Pawtucket Falls is posted in the boathouse. The traffic pattern for rowers is also on this map. All MRRRA rowers must be familiar with this and have a clear knowledge of the river; rowers must know the boat traffic pattern and abide by it. (see Traffic Pattern on the Merrimack River for Rowers appendix b).
10. Be aware of weather conditions. There are several inexpensive models of weather radios on the market. Use a weather radio or listen to local radio weather reports before going out on the water. Watch for gathering clouds, changes in wind speed and direction; temperature changes and other boats returning home. Familiarize yourself with shallow water, stumps, rocks, seasonal problems and landmarks. Rowers and scullers must assess the current/river flow, amount of debris in the water, height of the river and be familiar with obstacles and impediments to safety that may occur with changes in current and water levels day to day. Boats should not go afloat in adverse water or weather conditions. When in doubt do not go out!
 - a. Do not row in whitecaps, or winds of 12 knots or more under any circumstances.
 - b. If sudden winds come up, return to the boathouse if the trip is safe, or take the boat to the nearest shore and wait for the winds to calm.

- c. Try to minimize equipment damage, but remember that you are more valuable than the boat.
 - d. Do not row in fog unless your visibility to shore is at least 100 yards. Be sure to have land reference points. If fog sets in while you are on the water, move slowly, and be prepared to stop quickly. Use a sound making device (coxbox, horn, whistle or your voice) to advise other boats of your location as you talk your boat to shore, follow the shoreline back to the boathouse.
 - e. Do not row in an electrical storm. Do not launch if there is a threat of lightning. If you see lightening, hear thunder or your hair is standing on end do not launch. If you are on the water and see lightning, hear thunder, or notice your hair standing on due to static electricity, head for the nearest shore. If the storm is upon you, take your boat ashore and wait for the storm to pass. Thirty minutes must pass without lightening or thunder before considering return to the water.
11. Hypothermia occurs when a victim is subject to cold temperatures, cold water, ice or snow. There is potential danger for hypothermia when the water temperature is below 80 degrees and very high danger when the water temperature is below 50 degrees. In early spring and late fall rowing safety may be affected directly by the temperature of the water. There will posted notification of rowing restriction or added safety systems in these conditions. Refer to the bulletin board at the log in desk and the MRRA website, members section for specific seasonal safety procedures.

ON THE WATER

1. Boats shove off and approach the dock for landing while moving upstream.
2. On water warm-up should be used to gradually build from no pressure up to full intensity. An example would be building from no pressure “hands only, bodies over, ¼ slide, ½ slide, ¾ slide, full slide”, and then adding pressure until proper workout intensity is reached. Technique drills are recommended as part of the low intensity warm up phase.
3. Do not row below the Lowell bath house/swimming beach under any circumstances. In high water and/or fast current it is advised to stay well upstream of this point. When the safety line just above the Pawtucket Falls is not in place no boats shall travel downstream beyond the 1500m mark on the racing course. At other times areas of the river may be unsafe or restricted to rowers, notification of restricted rowing areas will be posted on the board at the log in book and website. All rowers should check these posting sites prior to rowing.
4. Right of way rules have been developed by the United States Coast Guard. Vessels with the least maneuverability have the right-of way, but always play it safe and take action to avoid all other types of boats. The maneuverability rule can be confusing. For example, a sailboat without wind has the right-of way, but a sailboat with wind must give right-of way to the shell. Be aware that not all motorboats have knowledge of or abide by these rules. Look out for yourself at all times.
5. No boat shall be on the water in poor visibility or in the hours between dusk and dawn. Less than 100 yards of visibility is considered poor. A good rule of thumb is if the Rourke Bridge is not clearly visible from the dock do not launch. Rowing is suspended until such time as visibility improves to 100 yards. If fog should roll in while on the water immediately slow your speed, head back to the boathouse observing the traffic pattern, stay as close to shore as is prudent and safe. Calling out or using a sound device (whistle, air horn, megaphone) is advisable during the return row to alert others of your presence.
6. Stay clear of bridge abutments and other man-made or natural obstacles. Do not negotiate a turn near such an obstacle.
7. The coxswain, single sculler or bow seat of a blind boat should make frequent checks of their course and other traffic on the river. Listen for oncoming traffic. Keep a lookout for debris, buoys, rocks, boaters, fisherman and swimmers.

8. Be courteous to others on the water. Be aware of powerboats and treat them with respect. Do not assume every motorboat is going to observe the USCG regulations on boating, watch out for yourself at all times.
9. Waves are generated by winds, tides, currents, or wakes from passing boats. Because shells are vulnerable to high waves, specific care is needed with approaching wakes.
 - a. If approaching wake is higher than the gunwale, the shell should be turned parallel to the wake to avoid having parts of the shell unsupported by the water. It is possible to split a shell under these conditions. Rowers should stop rowing and lean away from the approaching wake, with oars on the wake side lifted slightly.
 - b. If the wakes are lower than the gunwale and widely spaced, continue to row without a course adjustment. Deep and closely spaced wakes that are lower than the gunwale may be taken at a 90 degree angle with the bow directly toward them.
 - c. Turning in waves is tricky; allow plenty of room, energy and time.
10. Light conditions -- The greatest danger while rowing is a collision caused by limited vision or carelessness. Great care should be taken when rowing in near-darkness. Take extra care to look and listen. Minimize conversation. Be careful not to get too close to shore or known hazards. If rowing within half an hour of daybreak or dusk all rowing shells must be equipped with:
 - a. A white solid stern light attached to the boat outside the stern cockpit.
 - b. A solid green/red (port/starboard) bow light attached to the boat on the outside of the bow washbox.
 - c. It is also recommended light colored and or reflective clothing should be worn.
 - d. Carry a sound making device such as a whistle, air horn, bell to be used to alert others of your position if you should lose visibility while on the water.

AFTER THE ROW

1. Paddle-down at the end of your workout. It is important to your health that you don't race up to the dock. Once the boat and oars are stored, it is important to take another few minutes to go through your basic stretching exercises to identify unnoticed sprains or strains that began during your row.
2. Follow the procedures for wiping down the boat and oars, re-check the equipment and return it to its proper storage place.
3. Complete the log out procedure. (refer to the boat policies appendix c).
4. We are all guardians of the boathouse and the equipment within. If there is any question of safety or security contact an MRRA officer. If it is an emergency situation initiate a call to local authorities or call 911. Numbers are posted within the boathouse.

Emergency Conditions

Every rower, coxswain and coach must be prepared in the event of a capsize, swamping or being thrown from a boat.

1. Under no circumstances should a rower in the water leave his/her shell if no other assistance or rescue is available. Even if a swamped boat is within a swim able distance from the shore, the rower should swim the boat to the shore by heading downstream at

- an angle to the shore. So do not leave your floatation(shell/boat) even if you consider yourself a strong swimmer.
2. Should someone give the command “weigh enough! Hold water,” don’t ask questions, just respond immediately by stopping all forward body movement. Square the blades in the water and bring the boat to a halt.
 3. Use these distress signals to communicate to other boats: wave the arms or a shirt above your head or raise one oar in the air.
 4. Man overboard - Immediate command “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.
 5. Rower injured - Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!” Signal launch if first aid is needed.
 6. Shell damaged but afloat and not taking on water - Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!” Assess the situation, make adjustments and/or signal launch for assistance.
 7. Shell swamped - Immediate command “weigh enough! Hold water!” A shell is swamped when the interior water reached the gunwales. If rowers stay in the boat, the floatation ends may cause the boat to break apart.
 - a. Coxswain or stroke(in blind boats) directs rowers to untie, count off and by seat number rowers should carefully, but quickly, slip overboard.
 - b. If the boat is taking on excessive water, signal the launch and unload rowers by pairs - starting in the middle of the boat - as soon as possible in order to avoid damage to the boat. Pairs should form “buddies” and keep watch of each other. The cox should buddy with the stern pair.
 - c. If rescue is not imminent, take the following steps: 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 near riggers. 2) Then roll the boat to form a more stable floatation platform so rowers can either lie on top of the hull or buddies can hold onto each other across the hull. 3) Remember that body heat loss occurs 25 times faster in the water. Do not attempt to roll the boat if rescue is on the way.
 - d. A launch can shuttle rowers to the nearest shore. Be careful not to overload the launch. PFD’s should be distributed first to those remaining in the water and then to those rowers brought on board the launch.
 - e. When the boat has been brought to the shore, remove the oars. If the ends of the shell have filled with water, they must be drained before the boat can be removed from the water. Remove the shell carefully to avoid injury or damage. A boat full of water is very heavy, so try bailing first, then roll the boat slowly and remove it from the water.
 8. Singles and other rowing shells may be required to row with a buddy boat or launch depending on the environmental conditions, (especially water and air temperature) and/or the skill level of the rower. When the rescue boat is another shell, it may stabilize the single for re-entry. Entering the shell directly from the water may cause splashboard damage depending on the specific shell. In this situation swim the boat to shore, you may lie on the stern, using the shell as a paddleboard. In very cold weather with a buddy boat near, you can abandon your shell and lie on the stern deck of your buddy’s boat to be taken to shore. The loss of muscle control can occur very quickly and dramatically in cold water. The stern deck rescue may be your only option.
 9. Shell capsized - Immediate command “untie!” This rarely happens except in small boats. Be sure that all rowers and cox are accounted for. Stay with the boat until assistance arrives.
 10. Shell broken and sinking - Immediate command “unite!” Get out of the boat and follow the same procedures as for a swamped shell. Do not leave the floating boat. Swim boat to shore if launch is not immediate.

11. Another boat in distress - If a distress signal is seen and insufficient assistance is near that craft, maneuver your shell to the distressed shell. Assist in any way that does not jeopardize the lives in your shell.
12. Shells should stay within hailing distance of their safety launch or buddy boat. The launch has been outfitted to provide assistance to rowers and/or their shell in the event that it is needed.
13. Due to current, when swimming the boat to shore on the Merrimack, always swim downstream and at an angle to the shore. Do not fight the current; make steady, progression to shore.

Hypothermia – decreased body temperature

Hypothermia occurs when a victim is subject to cold temperatures, cold water, ice or snow. There is potential danger for hypothermia when the water temperature is below 80 degrees and very dangerous when the water temperature is below 50 degrees. Symptoms include feeling cold, turn bluish and shivering, and followed by numbness, apathy, lethargy, disorientation and loss of mental capacity.

Action if cold and shivering:

- a. Get out of the water quickly, even on top of the capsized boat. Heat loss is 25 times greater when in the water.
- b. Huddle with others
- c. Drown-proofing (dead man's float) is not an acceptable survival technique. Keep as much of the body out of the water as possible.
- d. Move to shelter quickly, remove wet clothing and re-warm body. In mild hypothermia conditions, re-warm in a shower, tub or with warm blankets.
- e. Do not give any liquids to drink, treat for shock.
- f. Continue to re-warm and always obtain medical assistance as soon as possible.

Action if cold and shivering has stopped:

- a. Treat as above but DO NOT RE-WARM EXREMITIES! If victim is no longer shivering, the torso must be re-warmed to avoid circulation cold blood to the heart. This can kill. Wrap the victim in a warm blanket and apply heat to under arms and groin area; wrap again in a separate blanket. Wrap each arm and leg separately to prevent re-warming. Hot packs should not be placed directly on the victim. A thin layer should be used to protect the victim in a sleeping bag with a warm person.
- b. Administer artificial respiration and CPR if necessary. Always obtain medical assistance as soon as possible.

Cold water emersion - Be aware that in very cold water people have survived as long as one hour underwater. Recover a victim immediately and even though there may be no sign of life, administer CPR efforts until medical assistance is obtained.

Hyperthermia - increased body temperature

Hyperthermia occurs when there is an increase in body temperature, usually when the air temperature is above 76 degrees, and the victim is exposed to sun and heat in combination with a decrease in fluids. It may occur when a) sweat cannot easily evaporate; b) the body is being heated by the environment; c) water loss from sweat and respiration is not replaced and dehydration occurs. Two serious conditions may result:

a. Heat exhaustion - Signs are throbbing headache, nausea, cool skin, chills, sweaty, and pale pulse. Action - drink water, shade from sun, and treat for shock.

b. Heat Stroke is life threatening- behavior changes, unconsciousness, hot but not sweaty, flushed warm skin and rapid pulse. Action- douse with cool water, shade from sun, fan, ensure the airway is open, always get medical assistance as soon as possible.

To avoid these problems in hot and humid weather:

- a. Maintain a high fluid level. Drink water before leaving the dock and frequently while on the water. Take an individual plastic water bottle for easy access.
- b. Avoid sunburn by using sunscreen, with a sweatband or hat to keep lotion out of eyes.
- c. Wear light clothing.
- d. Remain in the shade when off the water.
- e. Plan activity level consistent with the degree of heat and humidity.

Safety Launch –

The motor launch provides safety and supervision when rowing and support assistance in an emergency. At all times a safety launch will be maintained in good working order at the boathouse for use during MRRA activities and in emergency situations.

- b. The launch driver and occupants shall wear a PFD while in the launch.
- c. If possible a radio or cell phone shall be carried for communication with emergency services.
- d. Drivers should be competent in handling the motor launch and maneuvering around rowing shells.
- e. The motor launch shall be properly equipped at all times with the following emergency supplies:
 - (i) An approved PFD for each person in the motor launch. Extra PFD's in case of an emergency; if the launch is directly escorting more than one boat; the number of PFD's will be based on the number of person's in the largest boat.
 - (ii) Lights if before or after day light hours.
 - (iii) An efficient noise maker.
 - (iv) An anchor with a minimum of 50 feet of line.
 - (v) A paddle or oars
 - (vi) Adequate fuel to return to dock
 - (vii) A bailer
 - (viii) Large flashlight
 - (ix) 50 feet of rope with a life ring/flotation device
 - (x) First aid kit
 - (xi) Space blankets
 - (xi) Flare kit

MRRA boat policies – REV 4/11/05

1. Boat Usage:

- a. Boathouse closed whenever the docks are not in the water.
- b. Boathouse closed from 12/1 to 4/1 even if docks are in.
- c. Boat Captain may restrict rowing during extreme water levels or other hazards for safety reasons. Notice will be posted above log book and email sent to members.
- d. When the boathouse is closed, no private or club boats may be used.
- e. During March a launch must accompany all singles.
- f. During April and Nov, a buddy system of another boat must be used and the boats must stay within sight of each other. Additional restrictions will be posted on the bulletin board above the log book.

2. Rowing Procedure:

- a. When you go out for a row:
 - i. Check the bulletin board for notices, restrictions and/or changes in procedure since last row.
 - ii. Make sure the orange flag is hung on the MRRA garage door latch.
 - iii. Be precise and legible with making a log book entry and out/expected/in times
 - iv. Be precise in listing the boat that you are using.
 - v. Make sure that the oars used are MRRA club oars, signified with MRRA on or near collar. Do not use private oars.
 - vi. Leave slings outside to use upon your return.
- b. When you return from a row:
 - i. Make sure you check back in and fill in your return time.
 - ii. Wipe down boat to remove any river scum before it dries.
 - iii. If you are the last person perform 'lock up'.
 - iv. ** All rowers must be checked in. If for some reason you suspect someone did not check back in, look at the boat that they rowed, if that boat is sitting on the rack, and there are no other notes highlighted in the log book [e.g. "GONE FOR A RUN DON'T LOCK"] - assume they are in.**
- c. Lockup
 - i. Check all doors and windows of the boathouse to see if they have been opened - close and lock.
 - ii. Ensure all lights are shut off
 - iii. If a key holder is NOT scheduled to row - deadbolt the front door [turn the knob].
 - iv. In this case there is a gap between two groups and a key holder will be there to lock up!
 - v. Close the lobby-to-bay door.
 - vi. Put away any slings.
 - vii. Close and lock the MRRA bay door.
 - viii. Leave through the University bay door and lock from the outside.

ix. Close & lock the gate to the dock.

3. Schedule for Boat Use:

- a. Boats reserved for rowing classes or coaching classes pre-empt all others.
- b. A boat reservation for races will be posted on bulletin board. If there is a conflict for a particular race for a boat, it should be resolved between the club members first. If required, the boat captain will resolve who gets the boat based on: most practice time, and/or most competitive. The boat captain will attempt to determine as much as possible fair use of the boat.
- c. Boat Captain will determine based on usage and requests, if a reservation schedule will be created for a particular boat. Otherwise all boats are first-come, first serve basis.

4. Guests

- a. Occasional guests are permitted to row with a club member sponsoring them present.
- b. Guests write to the info@merrimackrowing.org.
- c. Club secretary forward the request for someone to host the guest.
- d. A volunteer host must meet the guest at the boathouse at a specific time to make sure they understand the procedures, rowing obstacles (the rock), select a club boat, and make sure they sign the waiver.
- e. The club sponsor should make sure that the guest is a qualified to row and they must also make sure the guest is back safely.
- f. The number of times someone can row as a guest should be limited to 2-3 times per year.
- g. Guests must sign a liability form.

5. Boat Transportation – Use of club equipment for races away from the boathouse.

- a. No Club equipment shall be transported to another rowing location without the Captain's permission. Shells shall be taken for regattas only as long as they are required for competition, travel and preparation for the regatta. Boats and other equipment must be safely returned to the boathouse as soon as possible.
- b. A shell may be taken from the club for occasional recreational purposes. The boat captain may approve the use based on:
 - i. Need of the boat by other members.
 - ii. Borrower's knowledge of the rowing location & local conditions.
 - iii. Proper car rack.
- c. All members who take shells on trips must be adequately trained in loading/securing, driving, and storing/protection of the equipment. Car racks that are used for carrying shells must be clamped or mechanically attached to the car's roof. Suction cups are not adequate. A safety line must be used to attach the front end of all car-topped shells to the vehicle in addition to those means normally used to fasten the boats to the boat rack. An aft line to the vehicle is highly recommended depending on the rack, as it will greatly reduce any leverage created by the shell on its rack

and on the car top. A red flag must be attached to the rear most part of all overhanging shells.

- d. The member or members who sign out a shell are responsible for it. The driver must have automobile insurance. Shells and oars are covered by MRRA hull insurance. Members must pay for any damages up to the deductible limit of MRRA's hull insurance policy.
 - e. If a member damages a boat, they may not use another club boat until the damaged boat is repaired or until the insurance deductible is paid.
6. Class A (racing) boats:
- a. These are designated by the Captain, usually the newest boats to be used for racing. It is the intent to restrict usage of these boats so that the useful racing life is longer, restricting their use for experienced rowers. They should not be used regularly by occasional recreational rowers.
 - b. Usage: A list of Class-A rowers for each boat will be posted.
 - c. Guests may not row Class-A boats.
 - d. Student members may not row Class-A boats.
7. Class-A Rowers:
- a. At least 1 full season of sculling experience required.
 - b. Active club membership for 1 year.
 - c. Demonstrate to boat captain or other club officer:
 - i. Display good 'rowing form'
 - ii. Row feathering off the water without tipping or stopping for 30 strokes
 - iii. Do 360 degree turns in both directions
 - iv. Emergency stop from at least 20 SPM at full pressure without flipping
 - v. Row, steer and navigate continuously without stopping to look frequently.
 - vi. Launch and return from mid-dock without assistance.
 - vii. Demonstrate how to take out a boat and return a boat to its rack in the boathouse without banging equipment.
 - viii. Explain procedures for reporting and taking responsibility for equipment breakage
8. Student Membership Restrictions
- a. Not allowed to row Class-A boats.
 - b. May not take club equipment away from boathouse (ie. to races) without another full club member.
9. Exceptions
- a. Exceptions to these policies may be granted on an individual basis by the boat captain or by petitioning the club officers. The exception will be granted only with a majority vote of a quorum of officers. An exception granted does not affect these policies and does not guarantee the same exception to other members of the club.

Appendix b.

TRAFFIC PATTERN for ROWERS on the MERRIMACK RIVER

- a) From the Bellegarde Boathouse all boats will launch and land with their bows upstream.
- b) Before launching and after landing all oars will be placed clear of all foot traffic.
- c) Keep the near shore of the river to the starboard side of the boat, always on the rowers left or coxswain's right.
- d) Upstream traffic should occupy only the 1/3 of the river closest to the north (boathouse side) bank.
- e) Downstream traffic should occupy only the nearest 1/3 of the river closest to the southern bank.
- f) The middle 1/3 of the river should be left open as a traffic divider for rowers.
- g) Do not row below the Lowell bath house/ swimming beach under any circumstances.
- h) Overtaking boats may pass other shells only if it is safe to do so.