

ROWER SAFETY

As with any outdoor sport, there is an inherent element of risk in rowing. Safety in rowing means:

- understanding and being able to assess the risks;
- understanding your limits, based on your tolerance and skill level;
- understanding the rules and regulations designed to keep rowers safe; and in particular
- being able to handle the boat competently for the conditions.

Rowers and coaches must be aware of their respective responsibilities for their own safety, as well as that of others and the equipment. Your club and coach will be knowledgeable about your club's safety code, as well as RCA's safety guidelines and Transport Canada Small Vessel Regulations.

Rower Responsibilities

- Wear clothing appropriate to the weather.
- Be familiar with key safety rules for your boathouse (e.g. sign-in/sign-out rules; hours of on-water activity etc.).
- Check your equipment before going out. This helps to identify basic problems that could compromise your own safety or that of other rowers.
- Understand the on-water flow pattern specific to your boathouse and body of water.
- You are responsible for letting your coach know if and when you feel uncomfortable with water and weather conditions.
- Learn what to do if a shell flips or swamps (e.g. stay with the boat; buddy up; get on the shell etc.). You should also know how to get back into a shell after flipping.

Your Swimming Skills

Because rowing is an on-water activity, it is possible that one day you may find yourself in the water. With this in mind, it is strongly recommended that you be able to swim a minimum of 50 metres while wearing light clothing. Your club's safety code may, in fact, have this as a prerequisite to being allowed to row.

If you are not able to swim, then you should wear an approved, inflatable PFD when on the water. (If you're under 16 years of age, you must wear a non-inflatable PFD.) Knowing how to swim, however, will add to your ability to relax and enjoy rowing. Check with your local recreation department or YW-YMCA for youth and adult learn-to-swim classes.

Did you know? Rowing was considered off-limits for women until the middle of the 20th century. Women's rowing events entered the Olympics in 1976.

Water and Weather Considerations



You should be familiar with the local weather and water conditions on the day you plan to row (e.g. fog, thunderstorms, ice, strong winds, rough or cold water). This determines if it is safe to launch.

Water will be rougher where the wind has had more distance to travel over it. Waves build as they are pushed toward the shore by the wind and as the water gets shallower.

Familiarizing Yourself With Transport Canada Small Vessel Regulations

As a rower, you must be familiar with some key Transport Canada regulations. We have summarized them for you below:

- Rowing shells NOT attended by a safety craft (e.g. a coach boat) must carry the correct number of PFDs or lifejackets and a sound-signalling device.
- Rowing shells attended by a safety boat are not required to carry safety equipment, provided the accompanying safety boat is carrying enough PFDs for each person in the largest rowing shell that they are accompanying.
- Rowing shells, even though they are not powered vessels, are still required to follow the “rules of the road” regarding right of way etc.

Regardless of the flow pattern at your boathouse as described in your club’s safety code, rowers must understand that they are still governed by the Transport Canada regulations.

There are two overarching principles:

- (1) Keep a lookout at all times.
- (2) Even if you are on a proper course, if another shell is on a collision course with you, you have a responsibility to avoid a collision.

If you have a safety concern, be sure to speak up. If something doesn’t feel right, it likely isn’t, and asking someone about it – either your coach or the program director – is the right thing to do. Our sport is very safe, and as rowers we must all work to keep it that way, no matter our level of experience, so ask away! Your coach and club personnel are always available to answer questions regarding safety.

Check www.rowingcanada.org for complete safety guidelines.