



RCA Transition to Abuse Free Sport- Expectations and Implementation Information

Background

An Independent Third Party (ITP) for Rowing in Canada has been in place since April 2019 and one of our priority initiatives was the creation and adoption of a pan-Canadian Safe Sport Policy Manual which is harmonized across our sport by being uniform and aligned at the RCA, Provincial Rowing Association and local levels. This has ensured that standards of behaviour and conduct, as well as procedures and sanctions as part of a complaint management process, are consistent across the country and at all levels for rowing in Canada.

In June 2022, services from the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner (OSIC) became available to National Sport Organizations through Abuse-Free Sport, the new independent mechanism to prevent and address maltreatment in sport. Information about Abuse-Free Sport is outlined below, and you are encouraged to visit their website to learn more.

Our pan-Canadian Safe Sport Policy Manuals were originally designed with the knowledge that an entity such as Abuse-Free Sport would eventually come into effect. A goal of ours has always been to seamlessly transition oversight of complaints related to maltreatment to an entity such as Abuse-Free Sport, with as little disruption to the harmonized approach and our member organizations as possible. In late 2022, RCA signed an agreement to join Abuse-Free Sport and transitioned certain components of complaint management to Abuse-Free Sport as of December 13, 2022.

Abuse-Free Sport

[Abuse-Free Sport](#) is an independent program that is part of a growing national movement to rid Canadian sport of all forms of harassment, discrimination and abuse. As a Program Signatory, RCA is an active player in this movement.

Unlike the previous approach, where each national sport organization created its own system for dealing with complaints of maltreatment, this is a centralized “one-stop shop.” It is independent and led by experts in their fields, using education and research to prevent maltreatment at all levels of sport.

The [Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner](#) (the Office) serves as the central hub. It operates independently to administer complaints about alleged violations of the [Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport](#) (UCCMS).

Where there are admissible allegations of abuse, harassment or discrimination, the Office conducts independent investigations and recommends sanctions against individuals who violate the UCCMS.

The Office will also maintain a national sanctions registry, which prevents individuals from evading sanctions by moving between different sports or jurisdictions.

For designated participants within our organization, there is access to a wide range of resources, including victim services and referrals to specialized mental health professionals and experienced lawyers, all in English and French.

Moving Forward

Since becoming effective with Abuse-Free Sport on December 13, 2022, certain key features have been in place:

- § Depending on one’s role, some individuals will be designated as “Abuse-Free Sport Participants”. In general, Abuse-Free Sport Participants have a role at the National level. A list of roles that will be assigned as Abuse-Free Sport Participants is outlined later in this resource. All other individuals who are subject to RCA’s policies are defined as “Individuals”.
- § Complaints related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS by Abuse-Free Sport Participants must be filed with Abuse-Free Sport.
- § Complaints related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS by Individuals who are not Abuse-Free Sport Participants must be filed with the Independent Third Party (ITP) for rowing.
- § Complaints related to other alleged misconduct under RCA Policies must be filed with the Independent Third Party (ITP) for rowing. This applies to both Abuse-Free Sport Participants and Individuals.

Table 1. Jurisdiction for complaints filed against UCCMS Participants and Individuals

Type of Complaint	Where Complaint is Filed	
	Abuse-Free Sport/OSIC	ITP for Rowing
Abuse-Free Sport Participant		
Alleged UCCMS Breach	X	
Other misconduct (non UCCMS Breach) allegation under RCA Policies		X
Individual		
Alleged UCCMS Breach		
Other misconduct (non UCCMS Breach) allegation under RCA Policies		X
		X*

*including if allegations against an Abuse-Free Sport Participant

Abuse-Free Sport Participants

Effective June 5, 2024 individuals in the following roles are considered Abuse-Free Sport Participants and any complaints against them related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS while active/participating in these roles should be filed with Abuse-Free Sport:

- o RCA Board Members

- RCA Umpires at National Events
- RCA Employees and Contractors
- RCA Seasonal Team Coaches
- RCA Senior Team Athletes
- RCA NextGen Athletes when named to Seasonal Teams
- Athletes and Coaches attending select RCA National Events and Activities
 - § National Rowing Championships
 - § Canada Cup
 - § Spring Trials and other selection related events.
- RCA Master Coach Developers
- RCA Umpire Clinicians

What to Expect

Recent changes in the Abuse-Free Sport Program Signatory Agreement and Abuse-Free Sport process have necessitated certain updates to be made. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- § Updates to the RCA Safe Sport Policy Manual (June 2024)
- § Updates to Provincial and Club Safe Sport Policy Manuals (Anticipated in 2024/2025)
- § Signing of new Consent Forms by Abuse-Free Sport Participants by June 5, 2024.

Policy Updates

The RCA Safe Sport Policy Manual will be updated to reflect the new Abuse-Free Sport processes related to filing complaints.

Onboarding

Anyone in a role outlined above as an Abuse-Free Sport Participant will be expected to sign an electronic consent form, even if one has already been signed. The new consent form is now housed with Abuse-Free Sport and can be signed electronically: <https://sportconsent.ca/login>

Education and Awareness

The RCA website has been updated to reflect the transition to Abuse Free Sport. Community resources will also be updated and provided for use at the local level.

We anticipate more information from Abuse-Free Sport will be made available and will be disseminated to National Sport Organizations directly from Abuse-Free Sport. RCA will develop complementary materials and cross-promote Abuse-Free Sport materials to our membership as it becomes available.

Provincial and Local (Clubs, Special Associations) will be encouraged to communicate new information to the members as it becomes available.

Common and Anticipated Questions

Q: Will there still be an Independent Third Party for Rowing?

A: Yes. The Independent Third Party (ITP) for Rowing will remain in place. The ITP will be the recipient of complaints related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS by Individuals (who are not Abuse-Free Sport Participants) as well as complaints related to other alleged misconduct under RCA Policies (for both Abuse-Free Sport Participants and Individuals). The ITP for rowing is currently Gord Hopper. Contact information for Gord is on the RCA Website in the [Safe Sport Section](#).

Q: I hold many roles – for example I am a Coach at my club and also an RCA Umpire who umpires at National Events. Because RCA Umpires at National Events are Abuse-Free Sport Participants does this mean any complaint against me related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS, including while I was coaching, will go to Abuse-Free Sport?

A: No. Only activities that are directly related to the roles that are listed as Abuse-Free Sport Participants will have complaints related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS sent to Abuse-Free Sport. In this scenario, a complaint against you related to alleged breaches to the UCCMS while acting as a club coach will be filed with the ITP for Rowing.

Q: Does my Club/Provincial Association/Special Association need to make changes to our Safe Sport Policy Manual now?

A: No. The RCA Safe Sport Policy Manual has been updated. We anticipate updates to the Provincial and Local Safe Sport Manuals sometime in 2024/2025.