

the good COXSWAIN

S A F E T Y O N T H E W A T E R



the good COXSWAIN

SAFETY ON THE WATER

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"Safety is just a very good reason to be confident."



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10.1 INTRODUCTION

What if an accident were to happen? What are the likely causes? Who's responsible? What should be done?

When it comes to safety in a rowing club **there is often a clear chain of command that leads invariably to the coxswain** – the person in charge of the boat on the water. However, the primary responsibility rests with the club, who must have developed and then communicated to members a localised safety program. In this instance a good coxswain will only be as good as the club or local rowing organisation that supports him with guidelines, information, training and supervision. The good coxswain should only leave the boathouse knowing that he has been given enough information to cope safely with any eventuality.

The good coxswain will ask his coach and/or club administrators for information to guide and assist him in his job. The information contained in this booklet cannot do this on its own. It must be considered as only an example for the development of a localised safety program. The rest is up to the club to provide more detailed and relevant information for their coxswains.

Once the boat is on the water, the coxswain will fulfil the responsibilities of **'chief safety officer'**. This has come to him via the coach, who in turn has been charged with responsibility by the club, who in turn, may have been directed by the local rowing organisation. The coxswain's job when on the water is to encourage the urgent activation of procedures already known by all crewmembers and the coach through the club.

THE BIG 'WHAT IF'S?'

The big question that underlines all issues of safety is "what if...?"
The coxswain should have answers that help address the key risks:



What if I have a collision?



What if the boat capsizes?



What if the weather is too hot, too cold, too windy or too stormy?



What if a rower collapses or cannot row?



What if I have to get help?



What if the boat is sinking?

As a coxswain you should actively engage with your coach and fellow crewmembers to implement your club's safety guidelines and procedures before going on the water. This may entail reading written guidelines, attending safety briefings and discussing concerns with the coach. Therefore, the first question a coxswain should ask himself is:

"Am I comfortable with the responsibility I have been given?"

If the answer to this is "no", the reason will be: "I do not have enough information or knowledge to respond adequately to issues of safety."

What is an appropriate amount of information? If a coxswain (or a coach) is unable to answer 'the big what ifs' or the following questions then there is reason to be uncomfortable with the responsibility of coxing – **you must address your concerns to the coach** and where appropriate he or she will raise them with the rowers or the club administration:

10.2 A QUESTION OF A CREWMEMBER'S PERSONAL SAFETY



Does my crew have enough experience to respond promptly to my instruction?



Do any of my crewmembers have a medical condition of which I should be aware?



Is there a mapped response or procedure I should follow if my crewmember has a pre existing medical condition?



Do I need to carry medicines or medical aides?



Can all of my crewmembers swim at least 100 metres in light clothing?



Do all crewmembers know what to do in an emergency?



Is there a list of vital telephone numbers relating to safety, prominently displayed?

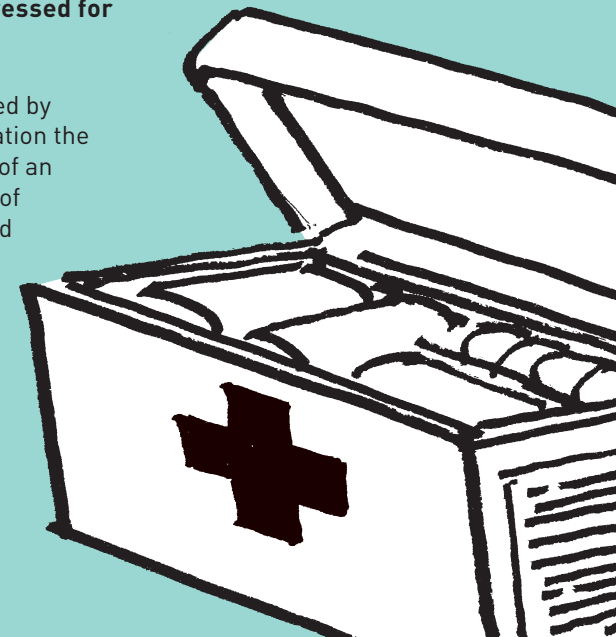


Is there a qualified first aid person at my club?



Are the crewmembers dressed for the conditions?

These questions are best addressed by the club and coach but it is information the coxswain should have in the event of an emergency. He will then be aware of likely risks and how he will respond will depend on the information he already possesses. e.g. "Here is your asthma puffer, Jill." or "Don't you think you will need more clothing, Mick." Or "Don't panic, you all know what to do."



10.3 A QUESTION OF THE EQUIPMENT'S SAFETY



Is there a bow ball fitted to my boat?



Is the boat fitted with quick release pull straps on the heels of the foot-stretchers?



Does the boat have sealed bow and stern compartments to assist floatation?



Can all moving parts function as designed?



Are the "buttons" on oars and sculls properly set?



Do I need to have lights attached to the bow and stern of the boat?



Does my speaker system work so that every crew member can hear me?

If the boat is not in good repair then the dangers are increased and the club has failed its duty of care. The best response to any of these circumstances is the decision "We are not going out in this boat."

I didn't know we were in danger but, thankfully, the cox of the crew we were about to collide with did. She not only stopped her own boat in time but her voice was so loud and so urgent that my crew stopped rowing as well! I was so shocked that the words "Check it hard!" were out of my mouth before I knew it.

Tess Harper, Coxswain

As a coach I was always looking for an advantage over opposition crews. When I saw our opposition not going out because of bad weather I made a bold statement that I would eventually regret, "We're not going to make excuses, we're going out! We should be prepared to do more than them - that's our advantage!" I was ready to ignore the white caps, the occasional squall - what's a little discomfort for a committed crew?

My crew pushed bravely into the battering head wind, bobbing like a cork in the waves. I was proud of their commitment, their sacrifice and steered my motorboat in alongside them.

It was hard to see through the piercing rain and I certainly didn't see the wind that caught the bow of my motorboat. Before I knew it I was in the water under my motorboat.

I managed to escape but the lesson was learnt - "An advantage is only an advantage if you live to use it!"

Michael "Bacchus" Stab - Coach

10.4 A QUESTION OF SAFE CONDITIONS



**Do these conditions create an unnecessary risk for rowing?
Will I feel safe if I go out?**



Are there electrical storms? Is it stormy? Is it squally? Is there thick fog? Is it too cold? Is it too hot? Are there white capped waves? Will it become dark? Is there a rapid flow?



Am I familiar with the layout, geography, design of my course?

The best advice for any coxswain answering these questions in the negative is **"If in doubt, don't go out."** It is not 'cowardly' to find an alternative form of training under such circumstances.

10.5 A QUESTION OF TRAFFIC SAFETY



Do I know the traffic rules?



Do I know where my responsibilities lie relative to other watercraft?



Am I familiar with the traffic flow through bridges, bottlenecks, buoys?



Are there restricted areas?



Do I know what procedure should be followed for landing and launching?



How should I handle motorboat wash?

The coxswain that is unable to answer these questions is not only a danger to himself and his crew but to other water users as well. Many of these are answered in this series of booklets and they are recommended to all coxes but be sure to seek more detailed localised information from your club.



10.6 WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY



1. What do I do if a collision is imminent?



2. What should I do after an accident has taken place?



3. Are there signals I can use if there is an emergency?



4. What do I do if the boat capsizes in cold water?



5. What do I do if the boat capsizes in warm water?



6. What do I do if the boat is taking on water?



7. What do I do if the boat is swamped?



8. Where is the nearest phone?



9. Do I know or can I access emergency telephone numbers?

These questions should be answered in the club's risk management documentation and/or be clearly displayed to all club members.

The coach will be aware of the procedures and the coxswains should be sure to make themselves aware of them. The procedures outlined in the following pages are in general terms and are not to be taken as an exhaustive or comprehensive outline of emergency procedures. Consult the club or local water authorities for their own safety procedures.



WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

1. WHAT DO I DO IF A COLLISION IS IMMINENT?

Call out and stop the boat – yell with all the volume and urgency you can muster “Easy, all. Check it hard!” This should leave the crew in no doubt that immediate action is necessary. It should also alert the crew of the boat with which you are about to collide. You should also warn that part of the boat that may have to take the brunt of the collision e.g. “Warning bow!”

2. WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER AN ACCIDENT HAS TAKEN PLACE?

The coxswain's primary concern is for his own safety, then the safety of his crew, then the boat. **Don't panic.** The first response should be to assess whether there is any further risk. Keep alert to any other vessels on a collision course, give warning. Check immediately after impact if all crewmembers are O.K. The coxswain may initiate the numbering off sequence to be assured of everyone's health and well-being i.e. “Let me know that you're OK. Number off from bow.”

Ascertain the degree of damage to the boat. Can the boat make for shore or home? If possible move to shore to make a full assessment.

An injured person is to be made secure and immobilised. In case of injury, or further risk, contact emergency services (000). A mobile phone may be available or someone can be sent to make the call. If possible also contact the rowing club house.

Remember to provide assistance to the other vessel if necessary.

3. ARE THERE SIGNALS I CAN USE IF THERE IS AN EMERGENCY?

Two arms waved in the air for emergency, one arm for non-emergency. Find any means at your disposal to gain the attention of others e.g. lights over the head, yelling, whistle. Sometimes, if at all safe, a raised oar will signal an emergency.

4. WHAT DO I DO IF THE BOAT CAPSIZES IN COLD WATER?

Firstly, stay with the boat. Do not leave the boat or attempt to swim to shore. Each crewmember should appreciate that the boat can stay afloat longer than a fully clothed individual.

If possible, get back in the boat immediately. If you or crewmembers are unable to get back in then lift as much of your body from the cold water as possible.

An upturned boat may provide greater flotation and raise crew members more easily and further from the water. Roll the boat over. Oars can also be used for flotation if the boat is unsuitable.

Ascertain that all crewmembers can be accounted for. Number off.

cont'd on next pages...



WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

5. WHAT DO I DO IF THE BOAT CAPSIZES IN WARM WATER?

Complete the same steps as previously (for capsizing in cold water), although full extraction from the water may not be as urgent.

6. WHAT DO I DO IF THE BOAT IS TAKING ON WATER?

Time will be of the essence but do not panic. If water continues to pour into the boat in large volumes then there will be limited time to avert sinking. If this is caused by high waves then seek shelter or, if safe, allow the wind and waves to take the boat toward calmer waters – do not fight against the conditions.

If large volumes of water in the boat are caused by the hull being holed then the closer the boat can be taken toward shore the better. Be mindful, however, that all boats rowed at speed, in either circumstance, can increase the rate of water inflow. Also, the more water on board, the slower the boat will move and the more water that enters the boat the lower it will sit in the water and the more difficult it will be to row.

Therefore, **a quick assessment is important** – do not continue and without delay head to the point of greatest protection or safety. The boat will not be able to travel a vast distance. The coxswain and crew will inevitably be powerless to move the boat at which point the swamping procedures below should be implemented.

However, if the boat retains some water and there is not continuing inflow of water then there may be more time to respond. Depending upon the amount of water that the boat is taking on, some crewmembers may sit the boat up (balance on an even keel) and assist the efforts of other crewmembers to row, thus taking the boat toward shore for assessment, safety or repair. It may be a simple matter of choosing an appropriate landing spot to remove the crew from the boat and the boat from the water. It can then be turned over and all water emptied from it before once again setting off.

If there is an option to remove crewmembers from a boat while on the water e.g. into a coach boat, then this also will help lift the boat higher from the water and lessen the inflow. The remaining rowers might then be able to make better progress toward the shore.

All of which should not be the entire responsibility of the coxswain but the good coxswain should exercise some initiative and leadership in implementing some of the necessary procedures. Ultimately, it is an assessment made by the coach, the stroke and the coxswain to decide upon the appropriate action. However, if the coxswain feels that circumstances dictate the need for caution and the implementation of safety procedures then they should make this known and then initiate action.

CONT'D...

7. WHAT DO I DO IF THE BOAT IS SWAMPED?

- Remain calm
- Ease yourself into the water and hold onto your rigger (do not remain in boat = damage)
- Do not leave the boat until you reach shore or are rescued by another craft
- Number off from bow
- Cox has the crew members pair off i.e. buddy system
- Shell can be rolled over to trap air inside to increase flotation
- Oars can be used for flotation to carry one rower
- Priority one - crew members, priority two - boat
- By kicking your feet propel your craft toward shore
- Injury - Calling for Help - Dial 000

8. WHAT IS THE BUDDY SYSTEM?

- Designate every rower with a Buddy Number. This can directly correlate to the seat number they are sitting in (i.e. Bow = 1, 2 seat = 2, Stroke = 4 or 8 depending on which boat you are in).
- The coxswain should be the commander for the Buddy System
- The cox will call the crew to take hold of the boat and to number off from bow
- When the whole crew is present, the cox will instruct the crew to re-enter the boat
- If someone is missing the cox should stay with the boat and the coach should call for help

9. WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO HELP OR EMERGENCY OPERATOR?

Assuming that crewmembers have reached shore and gained help or phone access, the following information should be provided:

- Location of the emergency, including nearby landmarks
- Telephone number from where call is being made
- What happened
- How many need help
- Condition of the casualty
- What aid is being given

Never hang up before the emergency service operator



WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY CONT'D...

10. WHAT TO DO IF THE BOAT BECOMES SUBMERGED OR STRANDED

- Note the position
- Immediately gain access to telephone assistance
- Call the authority in charge of the particular waterway
(e.g. Parks Victoria on 13 19 63)

11. WHAT IS TO BE DONE IF THERE IS RISK OF DROWNING AND RESCUE IS REQUIRED

Non-contact rescue (used if person in difficulty is conscious, cooperative and able to assist with the rescue)

- Remove oar from rigger
- Approach and reassure the person
- Keep at a safe distance
- Tell the person that the oar is to be passed and should be grasped firmly
- Assure the person that the oar will provide sufficient support
- Tell the person how to kick with the oar aid

This procedure may vary if the person being rescued requires further assistance. They can hold one end of the oar and the rescuer retains a hold on the other. The person is then instructed to hold the oar with two hands and stretch out on their front with head up. The rescuer can tow the person back to the boat while watching for signs of panic – reassure them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Royal Life Saving Society encourages all rowers and coxswains to develop:

- An extended range of swimming skills,
- Knowledge of safety and
- Personal survival abilities

It is recommended that all clubs and schools encourage their rowers to complete **Swim and Survive programs**, offered by the Royal Life Saving Society.

At all times, coxswains and their crews should know where they can locate a list of emergency numbers and a phone to gain immediate assistance.

Note: Some local safety regulations require coxswains to wear personal flotation devices (PFD). Be sure that the PFD allows unrestricted escape from the boat (especially stern-steered, front-loaded boats).



10.7 APPENDIX

HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia is often a danger in cold water. It refers to a lowered, deep body temperature. In cold water, the skin and external tissues become cooled very rapidly. However, it takes 10-15 minutes before the temperature of the heart and brain begins to cool. Decreased consciousness occurs when the deep-body temp falls from the normal 37°C to approximately 30°C-32°C.

If hypothermia is a danger then survival in the water will be assisted by the following; some of which have already been mentioned above:

- As soon as possible get on top of the overturned boat, but if not possible
- Head out of water, including back of head
- Arms against sides, chest
- Lower legs crossed, knees raised as much as waves and floatation permits, but keep knees together OR
- Huddle - two or more holding together

Crewmembers should refrain from using up energy unnecessarily – it is not necessary to move around to keep warm – warmth and energy will be lost. If all are able to get atop the boat or upturned hull and the shore is very close (within twenty-five metres) then the boat can be paddled to shore with kicking legs. Use the tide or current to assist.

- Once again try to attract attention.

SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF HYPOTHERMIA

These are common symptoms but hypothermia may not display any of these:

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

[Source: FISA Safe Practice of Rowing – Minimum Guidelines, 2006]



10.7 APPENDIX

OVERHEATING

As a predominantly summer sport, rowing in warmer climates will inevitably attract heat-related illnesses. But if sensible pre-cautions are taken when exposed to lengthy hours in the sun then common dangers can be avoided.

The coxswain can do much to negate the possible impact of the sun upon the crew by recommending and actively checking the use of sun-protective hats, water-bottles, sunscreen and shade. No crew performs well if suffering dehydration or any of the following (as a result of neglect or inattentiveness):

Heat Cramps: are painful muscle spasms. They result from a combination of fluid and salt loss caused by heavy sweating. Heat cramps usually occur after strenuous exercise or work outdoors in warm temperatures. They tend to occur in the legs and the abdomen. They are an indication of a more severe problem to come if proper care is not given shortly.

Care for Heat Cramps: Have the victim rest comfortably in a cool place, and provide him or her with cool water or a sports drink. Stretch the muscle gently and massage the area. Once the cramps stop, the victim may resume physical activity, but he or she should be sure to drink plenty of fluids during and after activity.

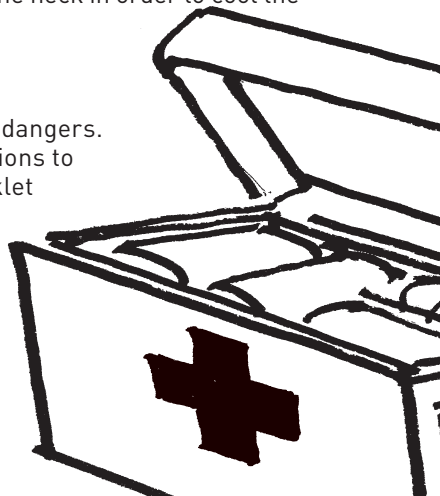
Heat Exhaustion: is the most common heat-related illness, typically occurs after strenuous exercise or work in a hot environment. The victim loses fluid through sweating, and blood flow to the skin increases, thus reducing blood flow to the vital organs. The victim therefore goes into mild shock. Symptoms of heat exhaustion are: normal or below normal body temperature; pale, moist, cool skin; headache; nausea; dizziness; weakness; and exhaustion.

Care for Heat-Related Illnesses:

If heat-related illness is recognized in the early stages, it can usually be reversed. Move the victim to a cool area and give him or her cool water to drink. Remove any tight or heavy clothing and cool the body however you can; apply cool, wet cloths to the skin, fan the victim, or place ice packs on the victim's wrists and ankles, in each armpit and on the neck in order to cool the large blood vessels.

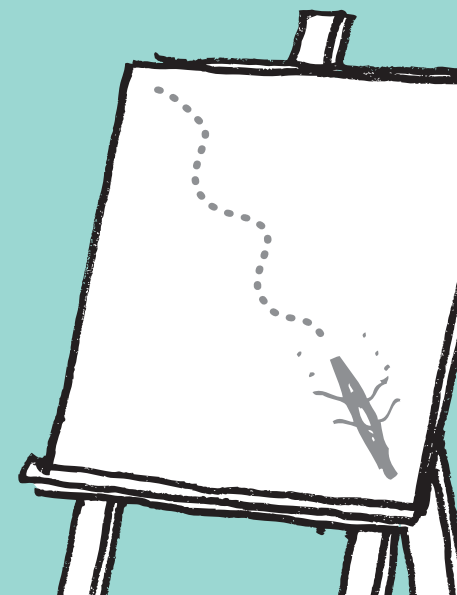
IN CONCLUSION

The good coxswain is alert to potential risks and dangers. He may not be able to provide answers and solutions to all likely safety scenarios as outlined in this booklet but he will work with the crew, club and/or association to lessen or negate the impact. All coxswains should be familiar with the safety plans and responses that exist within their local club - if in doubt, find out! If you can't find out - don't go out. See your coach or club administrator for details.



quick glossary

CAPSIZE	Overturning of a boat in water.
EMERGENCY	A sudden serious event for which immediate action is necessary.
EMERGENCY OPERATOR	Commonly the person that answers the phone when 000 has been dialled in time of emergency.
FLOATATION DEVICE	Anything that will hold to the surface of water that can be used to assist something or somebody to stay above the surface of that water.
HYPOTHERMIA	A condition caused by a lowered deep body temperature when exposed to extreme cold or an extended duration of cold.
NUMBER-OFF	Sequential calling out of individual seat positions by those members of a crew to verify their presence (similar to a roll-call).
SWAMPED	Flooding of a boat with water limiting its manoeuvrability and/or buoyancy.



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THE GOOD COXSWAIN WILL KNOW:

- ✓ Mapped responses or procedures in times of danger or emergency.
- ✓ The medical status and swimming abilities of all crewmembers.
- ✓ Whether crewmembers are familiar with an emergency routine.
- ✓ If a boat is capable of functioning as designed before going on the water.
- ✓ What constitutes a risk to boat and crew.
- ✓ Action to be taken in the event of swamping or capsize.
- ✓ How to access help in times of emergency.



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