

# Des Moines Rowing Club Safety Rules and Guidelines

## Introduction

The sport of rowing has a long history of ensuring safety above all else and the Des Moines Rowing Club (DMRC) wholly embraces this emphasis. Our club policy follows a comprehensive plan in accordance with safety guidelines set forth by USRowing (<http://www.usrowing.org/safety-expectations/>). These guidelines provide an excellent knowledge base and should be read and practiced by all club members at all times. In addition to the basic safety guidelines associated with our sport, we also need to adhere to the watercraft rules set by our state. When we are out rowing on the river, we are considered “boats” and are subject to state laws and responsibilities. These are described in the Iowa DNR’s Boating Handbook: ([https://www.boat-ed.com/assets/pdf/handbook/ia\\_handbook\\_entire.pdf](https://www.boat-ed.com/assets/pdf/handbook/ia_handbook_entire.pdf)).

This handbook also helps rowers know what to expect from boats sharing our waterway. If you observe gross safety infractions by other watercraft while you are out, please don’t hesitate to report the incidents. This is particularly applicable if you consider the safety of your crew to be compromised by such infractions. Obviously, each waterway has its own nuances and safety hazards. As such, this guide will serve to supplement the foundational guidelines set by USRowing with our Club’s local rules and guidelines. The overarching goal of this handbook is to provide education intended to protect the safety of all of our members under all conditions and to assist us in being good stewards of our equipment. Please familiarize yourself with this information as we are all personal stakeholders when it comes to safety. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact the DMRC board members at [directors@desmoinesrowing.org](mailto:directors@desmoinesrowing.org)

## I. Rowing in Low Light Conditions

Rowing on club equipment is allowed 60 minutes prior to sunrise and 30 minutes post sunset throughout the year provide all other weather and temperature conditions are met.

This is a great source of information that should help you make wise decisions:  
<https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/usa/des-moines>

Regardless of time of day or season, rowing in low light conditions always requires the use of a functional bow light on your rowing shell. If you are being coached from a launch, the launch must also have lights for visibility. Coxswains and coaches need to see and be seen. Reflective clothing, vests, etc. are all encouraged for coxswains, coaches, and crew when rowing in low light. Coxswains and at least one member of sculling crews should carry a whistle or other noisemaker to generate audible warnings, should the need arise. An audible alert is intended to warn other crews or crafts of impending danger or collision.

## II. Cold Weather / Winter Rowing

Rowing on club equipment when the cumulative air and water temperatures are below 100 degrees Fahrenheit is not allowed. Even if the combined temperatures are close but just over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, hypothermia can set in very quickly when the combination of cold weather and moisture work together to lower core body temperatures. In only a matter of minutes, an adult can become incapacitated by hypothermia. You don't have to have capsized your shell to be at risk. Moisture from splashing or cold rain can stress your body enough to lower your core temperature and put you at significant risk.

Crews rowing in this kind of weather should always carry at least one mobile phone, in case of emergency. They should also consider being accompanied by a coach or safety launch loaded with the club's safety equipment kit. If fewer than 4 oars propel your shell, you should consider rowing only with others in sight. Single scullers should always use the 'buddy system' and go out in pairs or larger groups. In the absence of a safety launch, crews should take care to stay as close to shore as the river allows (see above section specifying River Hazards).

Symptoms of early hypothermia include rapid, constant shivering, loss of strength and coordination, slurred speech, general confusion and poor decision-making. Anyone suffering from these symptoms should be transferred to a warm environment as quickly as possible. Assure an open airway is maintained. Remove wet clothing immediately upon reaching a safe, warm place and use blankets to raise the core body temperature. Focus on warming the torso area first and seek medical attention. Symptoms of profound hypothermia are pale, cold skin and stiffness. The victim will be unresponsive to stimuli and may be unconscious. You may be unable to ascertain evidence of cardio or respiratory activity. Move victim very gently, only as necessary. Prevent further heat loss, but do not attempt to warm victim. Maintain an open airway and proceed with emergency medical care (CPR, etc.). Call for emergency help immediately.

## III. Inclement Weather / River Conditions

Crews should use appropriate caution when faced with inclement weather. Fast currents, high winds, large or heavy amounts of debris, extreme temperatures, lightning storms and fog are all reasons for not practicing on the water. The club has instituted rules regarding river conditions that all rowers must adhere to when using club equipment. Always check conditions before heading out to row. The River zip code is 50316 and Gray's Lake zip code is 50321. A helpful link for viewing all temperature/wind/weather conditions:

(<https://www.wunderground.com/cgi-bin/findweather/getForecast?query=zmw:50309.1.99999>)

**Flow rate:** The flow rate of the river is stated in cubic feet per second (cfs). This metric provides a measure of how quickly and strongly the river is flowing at any given time. The flow rate safety guidelines are to be compared to readings taken by the USGS at the Second Avenue river

gauge ([https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?site\\_no=05482000](https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?site_no=05482000)). Failure to observe these guidelines could result in suspension of club privileges.

Caution Level	Flow Rate	Dock Status
Red	>13,000 cfs	Closed; no launching of club equipment
Yellow	10,000 cfs - 12,999 cfs	Open with caution; experienced crews only
Green	<10,000 cfs	Open without restrictions

**Winds:** Excessive winds are a fact of life in Central Iowa and can adversely impact the quality and safety of an outing. If the wind is strong enough to be generating whitecaps on the river, refrain from rowing. Club single sculls may not rowed when wind speeds reach 15 mph. High winds can catch and push lightweight blades and/or the hulls of smaller shells, increasing the risk of capsizing. The fewer oars you have propelling your shell, the higher your risk in windy conditions. Use wisdom before launching and consider the wind direction, its impact on river conditions and its potential impact on your ability to dock safely. Excessive winds from the Southeast direction tend to present more challenges to a safe outing. Scullers who are not highly experienced may not use club equipment to row if wind speeds exceed 10 mph.

**Storms:** Storms can roll in very quickly and without notice. Pay attention to the forecast and always check it before launching. In the event of thunder and lightning that arises while you are out on the water, move to the closest shoreline that allows a safe exit and wait for the thunder and lightning to stop before proceeding. Given the shortage of safe docking locations along the section of river the club frequents, this suggests that you should always row in close proximity of the boathouse when weather conditions are tenuous or uncertain. If you hear thunder or spot lightning prior to launching, you must wait 30 minutes after the last instance before putting your shell in the water. This is a standard guideline for all outdoor athletic activities and not unique to rowing.

**Fog:** Fog can roll in at any time of day, but tends to be a more prevalent issue for early morning rowers. If fog is in the local forecast, be aware that it can be much thicker over the river. Never row in fog unless the shoreline is visible from a distance of 100 meters. Always make certain you have a bow light affixed to your shell. Equipping your coxswain with extra lighting and/or high visibility apparel for added safety is also recommended. Since sound is also muffled by fog, make sure you are equipped with a whistle or other noisemaker. If you get caught in fog during an outing, proceed with caution and appropriately slower speeds, especially when docking. If the fog is too thick to navigate, it may be much safer to sit still and wait before attempting to proceed.

**Excessive Heat & Humidity:** In hot and humid weather, rowers are at risk for dehydration and heat exhaustion. Symptoms of both conditions include dizziness, headache, muscle cramps and nausea. When you know you are going to practice in high heat conditions, start hydrating in advance of your outing. Always carry water with you in the boat. If you tend to perspire heavily, consider treating your water with an additive that will help replace electrolytes throughout your session. Some popular choices are Gatorade powder, NUUN tablets, or Skratch Labs Exercise Hydration Mix. Experiment with one you like and use it to stay hydrated during oppressive summer heat and humidity.

#### **IV. General Safety Guidelines**

In addition to the aforementioned guidelines, the club has some overarching policies that apply to all rowers, all the time. These are basic rules or guidelines that are in place to ensure the safety of all club members.

- All rowers must know how to swim and have a signed swimming proficiency test or waiver on file with the club. This is typically handled via the registration process each spring.
- All rowers must have a current signed waiver of liability on file, which is renewed annually via the registration process.
- Novice rowers should view the water safety video as part of their initial orientation.
- Minors (under 18) must not be on the water without adult supervision.
- Coxes and scullers must attend the coxing theory clinic at least once.
- Single scullers are encouraged to use the buddy system, regardless of environmental conditions.
- All rowers and coxswains are expected to know and follow the river traffic patterns, rules, and hazard locations.
- All scullers and coxswains must record departures and returns in the boathouse log book.
- All coxswains and rowers should check their equipment before launching (bow ball present; skeg in good shape; rudder functioning; cox box audio working; no loose rigger hardware; foot stretchers, seats, tracks all in good condition; heel ties intact; oars in good condition; etc.). Any issues should be reported in the logbook **and** recorded in iCrew **and** to the club's Equipment Director. If equipment is not useable, attach a sign (paper and tape in office) to that effect so other crews do not employ it and put themselves at risk.
- When your crew has a boat on the dock and other crews are lining up to land, either walk your boat up the dock to allow space for the incoming crew to land or accelerate your launch or your carry into the boathouse. Coaches and crews should park equipment on the dock for the minimum amount of time when inbound traffic needs to land.
- If you have a known medical condition that may require special intervention (diabetes, asthma, allergies), always carry appropriate supplies with you in the boat (snacks, inhaler, epi-pen, etc.), in the event they become necessary.

All rowers should be aware of how to respond to emergency situations:

- Know distress signals. Wave your arms or shirt in the air. Raise an oar vertical to the boat if you are able to do so safely (larger sweep boats are more conducive).
- If the shell rolls, stay with it in most cases. If the shell sinks or if a river current is taking you toward a hazard, such as a dam, swim diagonally to the shore with the current.
- Use the 'buddy system' to account for teammates in any emergency (i.e. pair people up to watch out for one another).
- When assisting in a boating emergency, approach the site into the wind and from downstream to avoid drifting into the disabled boat.
- Establish verbal contact with those in the water and assess whether any have sustained injury.
- Rescue those in greatest distress first.
- Distribute life vests from the rescue craft(s).
- All attempts to bring injured parties into the launch should occur in pairs and be executed away from the motor.
- Conduct a headcount upon both arrival and departure from the accident scene.
- Complete an accident report and submit it to the board and the Safety Director.

The USRowing Safety Expectations also include instructions on how to handle Emergency Conditions. Familiarize yourself with these response measures and watch the USRowing Safety Video (<http://www.usrowing.org/safety-video/>) online to see demonstrations of a number of possible scenarios.

**You will be expected to comply with safety rules and guidelines as a member of DMRC**