

Safety at Mid Hudson Rowing Association (MHRA)

MHRA SafeSport Policy

MHRA participates in SafeSport awareness and training, and will report abuse, misconduct and SafeSport violations as necessary. In compliance with USRowing's 2023 update to their SafeSport guidelines, all MHRA Board Members and Coaches are expected to complete the required SafeSport training. MHRA encourages members to take SafeSport Training for Adult Athletes to learn about positive sport environments. MHRA SafeSport awareness and training is updated as required by USRowing and SafeSport policies.

Misconduct in Sport includes:

- o Bullying
- o Harassment
- o Hazing
- o Emotional Misconduct
- o Physical Misconduct
- o Sexual Misconduct, including child sexual abuse.

Reporting abuse can be verbal or written and addressed to any current MHRA Board Member. The Board Member is responsible to relay the information to our Head Coach and the MHRA President. The MHRA President shall call an executive session of the Board of Directors to address a reported incident.

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MHRA Safety Policy

MHRA has a Coaches Committee that is responsible to review and maintain MHRA safety standards, and coordinate all levels of coaching, including the club's Learn-to-Row Program. The Committee establishes guidelines for training new coaches and coxswains, and reviews and maintains certification standards for sculling. The Committee uses USRowing Safety Guidelines as a basis for establishing safe policies for MHRA. The Committee identifies local safety concerns and remedies. MHRA coaches routinely consult with coaches of other programs that row from the HRRRA Community Boathouse, to review local safety, practice, and regatta guidelines. The MHRA Coaches Committee meets at least twice each year, including prior to the first rowing session of the year, to review safety guidelines and establish a seasonal practice schedule.

MHRA Members must:

- Be current USRowing members in one of the categories for rowers, such as "Learn to Row," "Basic," or "Championship," as required by our liability insurance. Sign the USRowing waiver "member agreement" online annually. The MHRA club code is C73BZ. USRowing charges an annual membership fee.
- Complete the current year's "MHRA Rower Information and Safety Verification" form to name an emergency contact and identify health conditions that may affect athletic performance. <http://midhudsonrowing.org/forms/>
- Watch the USRowing Safety Video annually:
https://usrowing.org/sports/2016/6/19/1138_132107067295656159.aspx

MHRA is a USRowing organizational member and follows their safety guidelines. The December 1, 2022 USRowing Safety Guidelines state, "All athletes must pass a supervised swim test or complete the organization's swim test verification form."

MHRA recommends that members consult with their physician prior to engaging in athletic activity such as rowing. A Certified Lifeguard or American Red Cross Water Safety Instructor must sign the MHRA Swim Test Certification form and confirm that the member can accomplish the following tasks:

- Swim 50 yards
- Float or tread water for 10 minutes
- Put on a life jacket while in the water.

MHRA will periodically offer a swim test with a lifeguard at a local community pool. Using the criteria above, members can also arrange to take a test on their own.

If a member is unable to arrange to take the swim test with a lifeguard, the member can personally attest that they are able to complete the swim test requirements by signing the relevant statements on the "MHRA Rower Information and Safety Verification," which must be completed by all members annually as part of the MHRA Safety Policy.

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Learn-to-Row and Sculling Clinic participants, as well as guests and new members, must sign a waiver attesting that they can accomplish the requirements of the swim test.

Prior to participating in rowing sessions with MHRA, members must take a Learn-to-Row program, sculling lessons, or demonstrate equivalent knowledge, i.e., document prior training, certifications, or experience, in consultation with the MHRA Head Coach.

Safety during Practice

The MHRA Head Coach is responsible for overseeing safe practice protocols with the MHRA coaching staff. In the absence of the Head Coach on site on a particular day, the Designated Session Coach is responsible for the practice. The Head Coach or Designated Session Coach has the authority to cancel the practice for safety reasons. The supervisor for the session will be in the order of priority: Head Coach, Designated Session Coach, Launch Driver. Typically, the decision to cancel a practice because of unsafe weather or water conditions is made in consultation with the HRRRA Head Coach and/or other local coaches on site who utilize the HRRRA Community Boathouse.

All boats, team boats and scullers, MUST log out prior to getting on the water. MHRA uses an online registration system (SignUpGenius) for contact tracing / logging purposes. A magnetic white board is used on site, where each rower has a name tag that they are responsible to move to the “out” position indicating direction of travel (N or S), and then move their tag back to the “in” position when they return to the boathouse. The Coach for the session reviews the white board to be sure all rowers have safely returned.

Rowers may not pre-register for the club “quad” because coaches rely upon its availability for flexibility during open sweep row and in choppy conditions during coached sculling sessions.

Per USRowing guidelines and the HRRRA SOP policy of our lease, a launch is required to be in sight and hailing vicinity when four-and eight-person shells are on the water, regardless of water temperature.

USRowing December 2022 safety guidelines state, “All single scullers without supervision should carry a PFD in the boat.”

The Coaches Committee updated the MHRA safety policy for sculling in 2026 and beyond, making it more stringent than the USRowing guidelines, in deference to the size of the Hudson River. The new policy is that certified scullers must pass an annual flip test to demonstrate that they can get back into their boat. Sculler who cannot do this must wear a personal flotation device (PFD), or carry one in their shell when they row without a coach. The flip test will be offered a few times during the sculling season.

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Weather Guidelines

Tide, wind, air (temperature, fog, wind), darkness, and the weather forecast contribute to safe or unsafe rowing conditions. The coach and rowers consider each factor to determine whether it is safe to begin practice and whether rowers must return early. Coaches must also consider the experience of the crew when determining whether to take a boat on the water, and whether it is safe to allow singles or larger boats (more oars/boat) on the river.

Tide – MHRA recommends that rowers start practice rowing against the current, because a change in tide and/or wind speed could create choppy river conditions. The river can change quickly, and if conditions become unsafe for rowing, crews can float back toward the dock. Scullers and coaches should be aware of the anticipated timing of the tide turn.

Fog – Rowers shall not launch in foggy conditions if the “Walkway over the Hudson” (former Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, about 500 m south) and the Marist College docks (to the north) are not visible. Fog can descend quickly, and it is easy to lose one’s bearing in the fog, causing rowers to go off course. If it becomes foggy while on the river, row toward the Poughkeepsie shore and proceed slowly until visibility improves. Use your whistle or talk loudly so others know you are nearby.

Wind – MHRA does not go out in high winds, or when there are whitecaps on the river. Given the tidal nature of the Hudson River, scullers and coaches should be aware of the direction of the wind relative to the current and the expected timing of the tide turn. Winds blowing against the current can create rough river conditions even if the wind speed is not considered “high.”

Weather forecast/Storms – Assess current weather and the weather forecast before launching. Do not go out if the forecast calls for imminent storms. Do not go out if you hear thunder or see lightning. Do not launch until 20 minutes after the last audible thunder or visible lightning. If you are caught in a thunderstorm, seek shelter from lightning under a bridge or as close to shore as safely possible until the storm has passed.

See Appendix A for safe places to land in an emergency.

Darkness – Know local sunrise and sunset times. Shells without lights will not launch more than 30 minutes prior to actual sunrise or land more than 30 minutes after actual sunset. Shells may launch one hour before actual sunrise and land one hour after sunset, only if equipped with bow and stern lights. USRowing December 2022 Safety Guidelines state, “The bow of every boat should have a red light on the port side and green light on the starboard side, and a white stern light.” MHRA provides lights for club-owned shells and advises private boat owners to follow USRowing lighting guidelines. MHRA also suggests that scullers or the coxswain wear a white light that is visible from the stern.

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Temperature – Be aware of the danger of hyperthermia in very warm weather and take a water bottle in the boat. Wear sunscreen, a hat or visor, and wear light-colored clothing. Be aware of the danger of hypothermia, especially when the air and water are cold. Hypothermia danger is acute when the water temperature is below 50 degrees F, and hypothermia is possible anytime the water temperature is below 80 degrees F. MHRA follows cold water rowing rules when the river is under 60 degrees. See below.

Cold Water Rowing Rules

The **Buddy System** will apply for singles and doubles when the river temperature is between 50- and 60-degrees F.

The **Buddy System** rule is that all rowers, including certified scullers, must be accompanied by another sculler in a separate boat when the Hudson River water temperature is between 50- and 60-degrees F.

Per USRowing Safety Guidelines, when the water temperature is below 50 degrees F, or the air is below 40 degrees F, all boats (sweep and scull) must be accompanied by a launch within sight and hailing vicinity, typically within about 100 yards.

When the water temperature is above 60 degrees F, certified scullers may row alone, but MHRA recommends that scullers always row with a buddy for safety.

Equipment

Coach determines rower qualification for use of club equipment.

Prior to going out –

- Check seats, foot stretchers, and riggers for loose or missing parts.
- Check that shoe heel ties are firmly connected and the correct 3" length.
- If the boat has clogs, be sure the straps are in good condition.
- Be sure the bow ball is white and securely attached.
- Mount bow and stern lights if needed and turn them on.
- Make adjustments while the shell is properly supported on slings. Significant changes to club equipment such as pitch, span, and load, must be approved by the coach or equipment manager.
- Record damage in the problem log (located on the top of the bookshelf in our bay). Identify which boat needs repair, describe the damage and sign your name to the description so the coach or equipment manager can discuss the problem with you if needed. Do not take the boat out if the damage will make rowing unsafe.

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Coaching Launch Checklist

Coach/launch driver checks that the launch contains the following items –

- PFD for everyone on the water in the coach's command (there may be more than one MHRA coach out at a time, so each coach does not need a PFD for everyone on the river that day).
- First aid kit (waterproof)
- Paddle
- Noise maker (whistle, air horn)
- Anchor
- Flashlight
- Fire extinguisher
- Emergency rescue blankets
- Flares
- 15 meters of floatable rope
- Working lights if going out prior to sunrise or anticipating landing after sunset
- Toolkit for simple boat repair or adjustments
- Rescue safety ladder
- Boat bailer
- Engine cut-off switch (ECOS) lanyard, per US Federal law.

It is recommended that when the coach or launch driver is the sole person in the launch, ballast be placed in the bow.

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On the Water

Per USRowing guidelines and the HRRRA SOP policy of our lease, no four- or eight-person shells shall be on the water without a launch within sight and hailing vicinity.

MHRA does not recommend that scullers row alone. Uncertified scullers must be accompanied by a launch, and certified scullers are recommended to always use the buddy system. A certified sculler may take an uncertified rower out in a double without a launch on the water if the buddy system is used. The certified rower takes the bow seat and is responsible for steering and safe rowing practices. Per USRowing guidelines, all single scullers without supervision should carry a PFD in the boat.

If the coach is riding alone in the launch, it is recommended that the trim of the motor be set to keep the launch on plane.

If the launch motor becomes disabled, signal for help and then paddle to shore, or anchor the launch until help arrives.

Traffic Pattern

Follow the east shoreline going north.

Stay at least 100 meters off the east shore when going south, i.e. between the first and second stanchions of the "Walkway Over the Hudson" bridge.

Do not row in the shipping channel; row on the east side of the red river navigation buoys.

Stay away from the large area marked by lighted buoys that outline the dredging work in progress just south of the HRRRA dock and under the "Walkway over the Hudson" bridge. The work area is active primarily in the late summer and fall months.

If crossing to the western shore, row west perpendicular to the river until within 100 meters of shore. When returning to the eastern shore, again row perpendicular to the river until within 100 meters of shore.

Navigating River Wakes

The Hudson River is a commercial riverway that provides access to a wide variety of seagoing boats, including large barges with tugs, fishing vessels for commercial and recreational use, pleasure boats, small cruise ships, and personal watercraft. All generate wakes that rowers need to navigate.

If the wakes are higher than the rowing shell gunwales, then turn the shell parallel to the wake to avoid having parts of the shell unsupported by the water. Stop rowing and sit with oars resting on the water and allow the shell to float up and down with the wake. When the wake has subsided, turn the shell in the direction of your travel and continue rowing. Initially, there may be residual wakes, especially "bounce back" from the shore, so proceed cautiously.

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If the wakes are lower than the rowing shell gunwales and widely spaced, then it is possible to continue rowing without course adjustment.

If the wakes are lower than the rowing shell gunwales and closely or tightly spaced, then steer so the bow is directly into the waves.

Responses to Emergency Conditions on the river

If a shell swamps or flips, a rower in the water should never leave their shell. Even if a swamped boat is within a “swim-able” distance to shore, the rower should swim the boat to the shore. Do not leave your flotation (your boat) even if you consider yourself a strong swimmer.

If a boat is in imminent danger of running aground or into another boat or other obstacle, the coach or coxswain will give the command to “Weigh enough! Hold water!” Rowers should not ask questions but should respond immediately by stopping all forward body movement and square the blades in the water to bring the boat to a halt.

Commonly understood distress signals are to wave arms or a shirt over your head or raise one oar in the air.

If a rower goes overboard, the coxswain or coach will direct the remaining rowers to “Weigh enough! Hold water!” If the safety launch can get to the rower first, allow the launch to rescue the rower. If the launch is not in the immediate vicinity, back the shell to the rower in the water and have them hold onto the shell until the launch arrives. Another rower may have to enter the water to assist the rower if they are injured. If the rower is injured, the crew should signal the launch that first aid is needed.

If the rowing shell is damaged but afloat and not taking on water, the immediate command is to “Weigh enough! Hold water.” Make adjustments or signal the safety launch for assistance.

If the shell starts to swamp, the immediate command is to “Weigh enough! Hold water!” Then the coxswain will signal the safety launch and direct rowers to untie. By seat numbers from the middle of the shell first, rowers should carefully but efficiently, slip overboard opposite their rigger, and hang onto the side of the boat. Rowers exit the shell in pairs, remain together as “buddies” and keep watch on one another. The coxswain exits with the stern pair and remains with them. Signal the safety launch for rescue. Do not leave the boat.

If the shell swamps and rescue is not imminent, take the following step to roll the shell to create a floating platform:

- Remove the oars and place them parallel to the shell.
- All rowers and the coxswain should move to the two ends of the shell to avoid injury from the riggers when rolling the shell.
- Roll the boat to form a more stable platform. Rowers then lie on top of the hull, or buddies can hold onto each other across the hull. Remember that body heat loss occurs 25 times faster in the water than in air.

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- Do not attempt to roll the shell if rescue is on the way. The safety launch can shuttle rowers to the nearest shore, being careful not to overload the launch. The coach will provide a PFD to each rower.

When the boat has been brought to shore, remove the oars if they have not been removed already. Drain the water from the end compartments and the center of the shell before attempting to lift it. A boat full of water is very heavy! Use bailing pumps or small buckets to remove as much water from the boat as possible. Call on extra people to carefully lift and roll the boat to drain the water. Place it on slings to assess for damage before rowing the boat again.

If the shell is broken and sinking, rowers should continue as above for a swamped boat. Remain with the shell! Swim the boat to shore if the launch rescue is not imminent.

If the shell capsizes, all rowers should remove their feet from the shoes and stay with the boat. Rowers account for one another and keep watch on their pair partner, as they wait for assistance.

If a single or double swamps or flips, the coach in the safety launch can stabilize the boat to help the rower get back in. The coach may help the rower(s) climb into the safety launch and ferry them to shore. Request another safety launch to rescue the boat. If the safety launch is not close by, the rower can lie on the stern deck of the boat and paddle it to the nearest shore, as if the shell were a paddleboard. In very cold water, a rower could lie on the stern deck of a buddy's boat to be taken to shore. The loss of muscle control can occur very quickly and dramatically in cold water. A stern deck rescue may be the best option.

If a crew or sculler sees another shell in distress, and a safety launch is not in the vicinity, the coxswain or sculler can maneuver their boat to the distressed shell to assist in whatever way possible that does not jeopardize the rowers in your boat.

Often, the coach's toolkit or expertise are all that is needed for aid but having the launch nearby to assist with more serious incidents is critical.

Ending the practice

Be sure to allow time for a "paddle down" period after the workout, for good health. Approach the dock slowly and be aware of other boats also heading to the dock to land. Once the boat is stored, most rowers find that taking time to stretch tired muscles helps promote recovery and good health.

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Unsupervised Sculler Certification (Revised May 2020)

**Minimum requirements for sculling unsupervised (i.e., using the buddy system):
One year of rowing, a minimum of ten trips of 8000 meters on the river and
demonstrated knowledge of this skills guideline.**

The MHRA Head Coach is responsible for certifying scullers.

SAFETY

- Know and follow Mid-Hudson Rowing Association safety rules.
- Demonstrate common sense in making decisions about when and where to row.
- Know safety procedures re: tide, river safe landing points and hazards, navigation, sunrise/sunset, and weather.
- Know the accepted river traffic pattern and follow it.
- Know how to use the club logbook and use it regularly.
- Know what to do if you flip over or swamp.

CARE AND HANDLING OF EQUIPMENT

- Know which boats and oars belong to the club and which are private equipment.
- Know how to carry the boat and oars off the racks, using the lift if needed, and to the dock, and how to lift the boat out of the water and back to the racks (can be done with another person).
- Know how to adjust the foot stretchers and close the gate on the oar locks.
- Know how to clean the wheel tracks and check nuts and bolts for security.
- Know how to attach a bow light.

SEAMANSHIP

- Demonstrate ability to install oars correctly and get into the boat safely.
- Know how to launch and land at the dock.
- Know how to maneuver around river debris and other boats.
- Demonstrate steering by looking over your shoulder or using a rear-view mirror.
- Demonstrate quick stops.
- Demonstrate backing stroke.
- Demonstrate ability to make a 180-degree stationary turn.
- Demonstrate ability to get out of the boat and remove oars safely.

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Launch Driver Guidelines

It is recommended and expected that MHRA launch drivers will obtain their NY State Boating Safety Certification within a year of becoming a launch driver. New York State will require all motorboat operators to have their safe boating certificate by 2025.

Trainings are offered by the NY State Dept of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation:

<https://parks.ny.gov/recreation/boating/safety-courses.aspx>

Launch drivers are expected to operate the motorboat safely, understand how to start and stop the motor, and demonstrate basic seamanship.

Per US federal law, launch drivers are required to use an engine cut-off switch (ECOS) lanyard while operating the outboard motor.

Launch drivers are expected to know –

- The MHRA safety policies as explained in this document.
- Rules about weather, tide, darkness, wind
- What to do if a shell swamps or capsizes
- How to restart the motor and call for assistance
- Typical river hazards.
- Safe landing points.
- And follow the accepted river traffic pattern.
- Be familiar with the launch safety equipment, such as paddle, light, anchor, ladder, and have PFDs for all rowers and coxswains in his command.
- How to take the launch out of the water and where to store it.
- How to steer the launch away from the dock and land at the dock again.
- How to steer forward, reverse, idle and to maneuver around debris and other boats on the river.
- How to handle the launch in wakes and how to advise rowers about wakes.

“Moonlight Rows”

Any rowing sessions that are planned to launch more than one hour before actual sunrise or land more than one hour after sunset require special safety considerations approved by the Head Coach. Only experienced MHRA coxswains may cox for such sessions.

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APPENDIX A

Emergency Landing Sites – East side

The mouth of the Fall Kill Creek next to the Children’s Museum on the City of Poughkeepsie waterfront. In 2011, Tropical Storm Lee rearranged the shore there, creating a “jetty” of land so the shore is quite shallow in this area. At low tide, this area may be suitable only for a single or double, as a larger team boat may not be able to clear the “jetty.” While on the lookout for a landing spot, be aware of rocks and debris that get caught in this area.

The Waryas Park Boat launch drops off steeply but could be used in an emergency such as lightning.

At Kaal Rock Park, on the south side of the Mid Hudson Bridge, there is a small beach area onto which a shell can be beached. The depth drops off quickly and the oars need to be on the ground to stabilize the boat.

The cove south of Quiet Cove Park (there is an old boat ramp just south of the white house there).

The cove just north of Quiet Cove Park. There is a small dock jutting out into the cove.

The Brass Anchor marina, which is on the north side of the cove mentioned above. Crews could row inside the marina as far as possible, and rowers could disembark there.

Just north of the main part of Brass Anchor marina, on the north side of the rocky outcropping, there is a boat ramp and small dock.

Farther north, just beyond the Rodgers Point flag, is the Rodger’s Point Marina boat ramp that could be useful in an emergency. It will be difficult, but rowing the shell right up to the marina boat ramp will assist you to get the rowers ashore. The gradient is very steep, so that even if the bow rower can step out of the boat into ankle deep water (by the ramp), the coxswain will be over their head, but the coxswain could use the boat to get to shallow water.

Emergency Landing Sites – west side

South of The Highland Landing Park, about directly opposite the HRRA dock, there is a shallow section by the shoreline that would allow emergency landings.

Across the river from Quiet Cove Park, where the Columbia University boathouse used to be, it is possible to get ashore on the small section of land that juts out from the railroad bed. Beaching on the south side of this area is recommended over the north side. Be aware that there may be rattlesnakes in this area.