

Safety Alert - using your mobile phone to call for help

You may find yourself in a remote location and needing to summon help. It is useful to know how to do this using your mobile phone.

If you need help from the Emergency Services (Police, Fire, Ambulance, Coastguard, Mountain Rescue, etc.) then use a mobile phone and dial **112**.

112 has some very special features, dialling it will:-

- Access every available network, you are not limited to your network provider
- Take precedence over all other calls
- Work even if the phone has no credit
- Over-ride any security settings on the phone
- In more modern phones, may work even if there is no SIM card in the phone

112 works throughout the European Union and in many other countries.

If you cannot get through using voice then send a text. Text messages use a different bandwidth to voice messages. Texts are sent in small packets of data and will work even if the signal is weak and intermittent. You will need to register with **112** first but this is easy.

To register simply text the word **register** to **112**. You will be sent a text message, simply read it and reply with the word **yes**.

When you call or text please include the following information:-

- Your name
- Your location
- The nature of the distress
- The type of assistance that you need
- The number of people who need help and
- Any other relevant information

Watch the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPZv_8dABfU. This has more advice on the use of **112**.

**You may never need to call for help but you may,
and it is important to know how.**

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Safety Alert - Check Your Boat Before You Go Afloat

There have recently been reports from umpires stating that many boats had safety faults at events. Many of these related to inadequate or badly adjusted heel restraints.

It does not matter whether a boat is about to be used in competition or in a normal club outing, it is important that it is in good condition each time it is used. The only way to tell is to check them every time they are used.

Boats should be checked each time before they go afloat; many coaches teach their rowers to do this. A thorough boat and equipment check includes the following:

- No visible signs of damage to the hull, for example scrapes or cracks.
- Buoyancy compartments, seals, hatch covers, boat hull and ventilation bungs are secure and watertight. Buoyancy Bags should be installed if no under seat buoyancy compartments are fitted.
- Bow ball is in good condition and securely fixed (Some boats may not need bow balls if their bow is not pointed or they are made from a soft material. This is specified in the 2016 rules of racing).
- Fixing screws or bolts do not represent a hazard in the event of an accident.
- Heel restraints are strong secure and durable and the correct length. They must be properly adjusted (each heel shall be restrained to prevented it from rising higher than 7cm measured at right angles, from the footplate) and in working order..*
- Rudder lines, steering mechanisms and rudder (where fitted) and fin, are secure and in good working order.
- Outriggers, swivels, gates, seats, runners and stretchers are secure and operating correctly.
- Blades are undamaged and buttons are secure and properly set.
- The boat is suitable for the situation in which it is to be used, for example maximum crew weight.
- Lighting, if required, is suitable for the outing and working correctly.

Any boat or equipment that is found not to be satisfactory should be quarantined, with the nature of the damage clearly marked, and to ensure that it is not used. It is also important to ensure that any damage is repaired before the boat or equipment is used again.

Do not assume that everything is OK, check it for yourself.

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* The information on heel restraints is taken from the 2016 Rules of Racing. These are still subject to the approval of Council.

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Safety Alert - Marshals

There have recently been several incidents at events, some of these have been collisions. These have occurred due to either Marshals not being clear in their instructions or the failure of crews to follow clear instructions.

The primary duty of all officials, including Marshals, at events is to care for the **safety** of competitors, officials, other water users and the public at large. Events should ensure that Marshals are appropriately briefed and equipped to fulfill this duty.

The briefing for each Marshal should explain exactly what he or she is expected to do, and how they are expected to direct crews. They should be provided with the relevant section of the circulation plan for the area that they will supervise. There is an example of Marshal's Instructions in the event safety guide at <http://www.britishrowing.org/events/organising-events/event-organisers-manual/>.

The instructions should address the action required in specified circumstances, for example, how to deal with a crew wishing to overtake another and what to do if one crew impedes another. They should be instructed to tell a crew to stop so as to avoid a collision.

The information provided to Marshals should be consistent with that provided to competitors. It should be made clear in the instructions to competitors that there will be serious consequences if a crew fails to obey the instructions of a Marshal promptly. It should also be made clear that there will be serious consequences if a crew ignores a Marshal, is obstructive, or uses offensive remarks or gestures.

The instructions to Marshals should clearly specify the action that they should take in the event of an incident; this includes whom they should notify and how. They should be provided with a means of making contemporaneous notes about any incidents that they witness.

Organisers should ensure that each Marshal has all the equipment he or she is likely to need; in many cases this will include a loudhailer, a radio and a throw line. Organisers should also ensure that each Marshal knows how to use the equipment and that the Marshals should never put themselves or other people at risk.

Marshals working on or near the water should wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid at all times. Marshals should be clearly identified so that they are easily seen by coxes and crews and should be encouraged to ask crews to acknowledge any instructions they are given. Appropriate welfare arrangements should be available for Marshals and these should include breaks and access to toilet facilities, etc.

Inexperienced Marshals should not be left unsupervised for long periods of time. Ideally they should be accompanied by an experienced Marshal but it may be appropriate for them to be visited by an experienced Marshal periodically.

Marshals should be reminded that safety overrides everything else that they do.

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Safety Alert - Outboard Motor Safety Checks

Many clubs use outboard motors on their coaching and safety launches and it is tempting take them for granted. This could be a dangerous mistake. Defects do develop and it is worth a quick check, prior to each outing, to ensure that the boat and its engine are working correctly.

The motor should not start if it is in gear (except for some small engines that do not have selectable gears). With the kill cord removed, check that the motor will not turn over if it is in gear.

Check that the gear selector works correctly; the motor should not slip in or out of gear

Check that the kill cord works. One end should be attached to the motor or the boat and the other end should be connected to the driver's leg or lifejacket. Start the motor and detach the kill cord (from the motor or boat); the motor should stop immediately.

Check that the outboard is securely fixed to the boat. If you think that outboards never fall off launches then have a look at the examples on YouTube (search YouTube for "outboard falls off").

Ensure that you have a secondary means of propulsion, in practice this means carry paddles or oars. If you operate where there can be a strong tide or current then you should also carry an anchor with chain or rope. The length of the rope should be at least three times the depth of water.

Have a look at the RNLI guide to checking outboards at <http://completeguide.rnli.org/outboard-pre-start.html>

If you are going afloat in the dark then check that the navigation lights are switched on and are working correctly. As launches used for coaching can normally be classed as power driven vessels capable of exceeding 7 knots, they should display an all-round white light and port and starboard navigation lights.

Also, check that the lights on the boats that you are accompanying work correctly and in accordance with the requirements of your navigating authority.

Never, ever go out at night alone. Either have at least two people in the launch or stay close to another boat at all times. They may need your assistance and you may need theirs.

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Safety Alert - what do you do if you see a red flag?

From time to time river and other navigation authorities issue information about the safety of conditions on their waterway, these are often based on the water flow rate or velocity. This information can be in the form of coloured (typically red or yellow) flags or boards. It is always important to know what information is currently being posted before starting any activity on the water.

The first step for Clubs is to determine the status of the information being provided by their local navigation authority. Is it a prohibition or is it a warning? If it is a prohibition then it should be treated as such and no boats should go afloat.

If it is a warning, or cautionary notice, then it should be treated with respect, but it may still be safe to start a water based activity. However, many other conditions will have to be assessed.

Activities on the water should only happen if a risk assessment shows that the level of risk is acceptable. This risk assessment should take all relevant factors into account, including those listed below:-

- Flow speed
- Presence of turbulence, for example around obstructions, bends, etc.
- Water surface conditions
- Wind strength and other weather conditions
- Presence of other hazards (e.g. bridges, pontoons, weirs, etc.) that crews could be swept into or over
- Presence of other river users
- Presence of floating debris or water contamination
- Strength and endurance and confidence of crew
- Willingness of every individual member of the crew to take part
- Size and stability of boat
- Competence of the cox (or steers)
- Any other factor that applies to the conditions, club, crew, boat, location, etc.

Do not forget the cox. It takes great skill and knowledge to control a boat on fast moving waters. It is best not to go afloat unless you know that your cox (or steers) is capable of handling the conditions and that they feel confident to do so. There is training material for coxes (and steers) at rowhow.org/course/view.php?id=114 .

If there is no warning then do not assume that it is safe to start an activity. The factors listed above should still be considered.

If in doubt, don't go out.

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Safety Alert - Lights on Rowing Boats

It is that time of year when there are not enough daylight hours for us to be able to do all the things we want to do. Sometimes we will want to go afloat at night.

Darkness brings its own set of hazards and what can seem simple by daylight can become difficult and dangerous at night. It is important that boats show the navigation lights specified by their local navigation authority. The lights should be bright and clear. The purpose of navigation is to enable your boat to be seen and to enable you to see other boats. Not only should you be able to see them but they will also tell you something about what type of boat it is and where it is heading.

Lights should be fixed in the Empacher slot on the bow and at the top the rudder yoke in the stern. This will make them easy to see. If you mount the light directly onto the hull then ensure that it is not hidden by the saxboards. Lights can also be mounted on a pole on the stern behind the cox or in the bow in front of a steersman – although care must be taken to conserve night vision with this system. LED sticks on the back of the cox or bowman are also useful, although only as an addition to the main lighting system.

If you are rowing or sculling at night then wear white above the waist. High visibility clothing can also work well.

The following do not work and should be avoided:

Head Torches – the movement of your head ensures it cannot be seen from all directions.

Using only one light – unless it is on a pole that is higher than your head

Lights with Low Batteries – a failing or weak light is worse than nothing as it can give you a false sense of security.

Going Solo – the more people there are in a tight group the more likely you are to be spotted

Dark Clothing – a black wetsuit or compression top may well be warm but it can also make you invisible to other traffic

The rules on lights on boats can be different in each navigating authority so check with yours and make sure that you comply with them. The rules on the Thames in London are:-

“All rowing crews must have the following lights firmly fixed to their boat in low visibility.

On the bow: a flashing white light – flashing to determine direction of travel

On the stern: a constant white light The lights must be visible for 800m and also be visible through 180° – so that the boat effectively has lighting visible through 360°.”

(See page 15 of the PLA Guide “[Rowing on the Tideway](#)”.)

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Safety Alert - Is it safe to go afloat alone?

Many scullers enjoy the freedom of an outing alone on a lovely quiet stretch of water but there are hidden dangers that they may not be aware of.

If you have a problem when out sculling alone then there may be nobody to help you and nobody to raise the alarm.

It is up to each Club to set its own rules. Clubs should set rules that tell their members whether an outing can or cannot happen. This is not a decision that can be left to members alone.

The rules should be defined based on risk assessment. The level of risk can be estimated by considering the potential severity of a hazardous event, taking into account the controls, and the probability of that harm occurring, taking into account the barriers. (See [Safety Basics](#) on Row How for more information on risk assessment).

Factors that tend to increase the probability of a hazardous event include:-

- The presence of other water users (boats, wash, etc.)
- The extent to which the water is exposed to the wind
- Weather (e.g. wind strength, including gusts, and direction)
- Stream speed and static obstructions such as moored boats, bridges etc.
- The relative experience and competence of the rower

Factors that tend to increase the severity of a hazardous event include:-

- Absence of other water users, spectators, coaches, passers-by, water-side safety equipment
- Low water temperature and deep water (cannot wade ashore)
- Large distance to the bank
- Obstructions at the water's edge (e.g. high banks, reeds and walls).

The conclusions on risk should be used to define the Club rules and these should be clearly communicated to Club members. These rules should state under what conditions boats may go afloat alone and in company.

For example, they may say that small boats (1xs, 2xs & 2-s) may only go afloat in specified areas in groups of two or more and stay within sight of each other; Juniors may only go afloat if accompanied by a coach; and no boats may go afloat if there is ice or “white horses” on the surface of the water.

Please remember, Juniors should **always** be accompanied by a responsible adult.

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