

SECTION 1 SAFETY RULES

- MVRC docks are available to authorized users for the purpose of launching rowing shells, and launches unless they have been closed by the Head Coach or Board President.
- The MVRC Head Coach and/or Board President decides when dock closings are necessary. When closing the docks, the Head Coach and/or Board President shall take under consideration criteria affecting boating safety as specified by the safety rules.
- When the docks are closed, no boats of any kind may be launched from MVRC docks or property by any user or individual.
- When the docks are closed, they shall remain closed until the Head Coach and/or Board President has opened them.

Safety Matrix

- All rowers and coaches must abide by the provisions of the published safety matrix, which represents minimum acceptable standards for water temperature and flow for safe rowing conditions.
- The Safety Matrix does not cover all conditions relevant to safety, and each rower, coxswain, crew leader, or coach is responsible to assess all conditions and decide whether, even if permitted by the Matrix, it is advisable to launch.
- **All coaches and rowers are required to use common sense.**

Traffic Patterns: Right of Way

- All watercraft must be operated in compliance with the relevant boating regulations including General Marine Right of Way as promulgated by the PA Fish and Boat Commission and other agencies.
 - General Marine Rules of Right of Way:
 - Vessels with the least maneuverability have right-of-way, but should be cautious and take action to avoid all other types of boats.
 - Non-powered boats have right of way over powered boats.
 - Barges, have very limited maneuverability, so that they always have right of way over rowing shells.
- Also, barge pilots cannot see small craft easily and their radar will not pick up rowing shells. Be aware that there is a significant 'blind spot' (the line of sight from the pilot house to beyond the bow of the barge) in front of a barge.

○ When in doubt, always yield the right-of-way.

Rowing Traffic Patterns

- All boats launching from the MVRC dock should comply with the posted MVRC traffic patterns.
- Any boat not complying with the posted traffic patterns must yield right of way to boats in the pattern, except in the case of emergency.

MVRC Safety Guidelines for Rowers & Coaches

Traffic Patterns at MVRC Docks:

- Launch and land with bow upstream.
- When launching use the most upstream section of available dock space and walk the boat up as space opens up.
- When landing use the most downstream section of available dock.
- After launching, paddle upstream under the railroad bridge in the back channel before turning to face downstream
- When launching kayaks, outrigger canoes, and dragon boats, paddle upstream to at least 500 yards before turning downstream, or cutting over to the main channel of the river.
- Incoming (docking) boats have right of way over launching boats.
- When other crews are waiting for dock space, tie in and adjust foot stretchers on the water.
- Dragon boats should not send the boat's bow or stern out into the channel to take the boat out of the water unless there is no other channel traffic.
- Boats without coxswains have right of way over boats with coxswains.
 - All crews are prohibited from returning to the docks at either facility via the top of the channel, barring adverse weather conditions or of another issue related to the safety of the crews.
 - Entering / Exiting the Channel:
 - Boats traveling in the channel may not do slow drills, such as pick drills, if there are other boats behind.
- **Boats doing power pieces must always yield the right of way in the Back Channel.**
- All crews should practice on the main river whenever possible. 5

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MVRC Safety Guidelines for Rowers & Coaches

Traffic Patterns in the River (Appendix B - River Map):

- Coaches and all paddlers and rowers should be aware that **the center of the river is a federally designated commercial waterway, used by barges.**
- Always keep to the right hand/starboard side (from the coxswain and paddlers' perspective) of the river.
- EXCEPTION: between the top of the Channel and the first upstream green buoy. Here, boats may proceed upstream on the left hand side of the river **until the first green buoy only.**
- River Buoys
 - River buoys generally mark the navigation channel for larger commercial traffic.
- In all other cases, the preferred and safest course is to the shore side of the buoys, outside of the navigation channel.
 - Striking buoys, particularly in combination with fast current, is a significant safety hazard and is likely to cause serious equipment damage. Care must be taken by all persons responsible for course to locate the buoys well in advance of reaching them and planning safe passage past them.
 - No wake' buoys: You may wish to take the bow number (PA registration) of any boat violating these rules and report the incident to the MVRC Executive Director or the PA Fish and Boat Commission.

Crew Leader Requirements Certifications

- All outings shall comply with Crew Leader or Blind Boat Certification Requirements.

Accountability

- Crews shall comply with safety related directives from their designated Crew Leaders.

Safety Equipment Requirements Paddling / Rowing Equipment

Rowing Boat PFDs:

- Coxswains must wear or have available a PFD as set forth in the Safety Matrix.
- Children under 12 must wear a PFD.
- When in doubt, carry a PFD such as an auto-inflate pouch or a regular life jacket.

Lights for Rowing Shells

- All rowing boats shall exhibit properly functioning lights before and after sunset
 - Bow light: solid white light
 - Stern light: flashing white light
- These lights must be large enough to be clearly visible from a distance of 2 miles.
- All bow lights shall be mounted on the rowing shell.
- On sculling boats, the stern light shall be mounted on the rowing shell.
- In stern-coxed boats, it shall be permissible for the stern light to be worn by the coxswain, provided that it faces in the appropriate direction, does not hang down, and is not obscured by the coxswain hair or clothing.
- Spotlights are also required in the safety launch and should be used to illuminate hazards, such as buoys and debris and to signal other craft on the water, including barges and other motorized craft.

Responsibility for Safety Equipment

- It is the responsibility of the person in charge of each watercraft to ensure that it is in proper operating condition and that all required safety equipment is on board and properly deployed.

Behavior at MVRC Facilities and in MVRC Equipment

Personal Behavior

- Violations of USRowing SAFESPORT policies will not be tolerated.
- No rowdy behavior, horseplay or any behavior likely to cause injury to persons or damage to property is permitted.

Alcohol

- No alcohol is permitted to be brought to or consumed on the premises or in any MVRC boat, except in connection with Club sanctioned events and parties.
- No weapons, knives (spring-operated or over 4 inches), or firearms of any description are permitted in MVRC facilities, or equipment.

Incident Reports

Reporting

- All occurrences of personal injury, major equipment damage, collision with other boats, must be reported immediately to the Head Coach, who in turn will inform the Board President as soon as practicable.
- **In case of injury requiring hospital or EMS treatment, the Board President must be notified as soon as practicable and will inform the remaining board members, in addition to any other required notifications.**

- Should reports of such incidents be required by any governmental authority, such reports must be filed in timely fashion and the MVRC Board President must be copied.
- ALL equipment damage must be reported as soon as possible so that it can be addressed and have as little impact as possible on rowing operations.

Infractions

Reporting

- When the Head Coach and Board members become aware of a breach of the Rules and Guidelines or of an otherwise unsafe practice, the Board and Head Coach will follow the steps outlined in the [Safety Violations & Penalties document](#).
- In addition to the procedures outlined in the Safety Violations & Penalties document, if the Board and Head Coach determine, based on prior conduct and/or penalties, or based upon a new incident report, that the individual, coach or program shows a disregard for the safety rules and guidelines, the Head Coach and/or members of the Board shall request a meeting with the individual.
- Following the meeting, any penalties issued shall be consistent with the structure of the Safety Violations & Penalties document, with notice to all appropriate individuals.

Equipment Checkout Personal Responsibility

SAFE PRACTICES

- Each rower and sculler should take personal responsibility for:
 - Being physically conditioned for the sport of rowing. Consult a physician before starting any form of exercise. Before beginning to row, go through a warm up and/or a basic set of stretching exercises.
 - Being fully aware of the weather conditions and possible safety hazards.
 - Listen to the weather forecast and consult the many available weather and storm-tracker apps.
 - The current official app of MVRC are:
 - [Weatherbug](#)
 - Vessel Tracker
 - Adhering to the Equipment Classification System which indicates the boats each rower is permitted to use according to skill or certification level.

Safety Launch Equipment

- Safety Launches with crews must carry:
 - PFDs Appropriate to the number of rowers not already wearing or carrying PFD's
 - 2 emergency blankets in a water tight container (in cold conditions)

- Tool kit with:
 - with standard and/or metric wrenches
 - at least 1 adjustable wrench
 - Pliers
 - Electrical Tape
- First Aid Kit
- Lifeline or throw bag
- Fire extinguisher
- Flashlight and/or Spotlight before sunrise and after sunset
- Bailer
- Communication device (radio or cell phone)
- Defective or damaged equipment must be reported to the Head Coach.
- Safety Launches must also have:
 - A Coast Guard Approved Personal Flotation Device (PFD) for each person in the launch and each person in a boat not already carrying one.
 - A throwable rescue device such as an approved floating seat cushion.
 - Lights if before sunrise or after sundown.
 - For Safety launches, these should be standard red/green bow lights and all-around white stern light.
 - A spotlight must also be available and used while in a launch in the before sunrise or after sundown.
 - An efficient noise making device.
 - An anchor with at least 50' of anchor line attached to launch.
 - At least one oar or paddle.
 - Valid registration stickers

Emergencies

Who to call:

- Calls for Help - To EMS (Emergency Medical Service), Pittsburgh River Rescue

- DIAL 911, or
- CHANNEL16 (Marine Radio)
- **What to Say:**
 - You will be asked, "What is your emergency?"
 - You should report the nature of the accident.

For example, "There has been a boating accident and there are rowers in the water"

- You may be asked:
 - your location (name of river, landmarks)?
 - how many people are involved and is anybody missing?
 - age and gender of people?
 - are victims conscious or unconscious
 - are victims breathing or not breathing
 - is CPR being performed
 - is CPR required
 - time of incident
 - how many boats are involved?
 - the name of a contact person and the contact information?
 - will there be someone to meet the paramedics?
 - If you are at the boathouse or on shore that a land based crew will be sent.
 - If you are in the middle of the river and need to have rescue sent by water, you need to request this. An EMS supervisor will make the decision.
- IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND YOUR LOCATION:
- IDENTIFY THE MEANS BY WHICH EMS WILL CONTACT YOU:
- You may say, " My mobile portable telephone number is .
- Indicate your use of marine radio and channel, if applicable.
 - IDENTIFY WHICH TELEPHONE YOU WILL BE ATTENDING:
 - Cell Phone or
 - Office phone or
 - Marine Radio
 - REQUEST AMBULANCE AND/OR RIVER RESCUE AS REQUIRED

Additional Safety Guidelines

General Guidelines:

- Under no circumstances should a rower in the water leave the floating boat.
 - Even if a swamped boat seems to be a swimmable distance from shore, the rower should swim the boat to shore. Do not leave your flotation, even if you consider yourself to be a strong swimmer.

- The only exception to this would be if you are faced with a worse life-threatening danger by staying with the boat for example if you are in the path of a barge and cannot swim the boat away fast enough to avoid being hit.
- When someone gives the command “Hold the boat” or `WAY ENOUGH - HOLD WATER'. Don't ask questions; just respond immediately by stopping all forward body movement. Square the blades quickly into the water to bring the boat to a halt.
- Use these distress signals to communicate to other boats:
 - wave your arms or a shirt above your head
 - raise one oar or paddle in the air (this method preferable only in eights or doubles and quads)
 - use air horn/whistle, or marine radio.

Person Overboard Guidelines:

- If a rower or coxswain is unexpectedly thrown from a boat, immediately call the command “Hold the boat” or `WAY ENOUGH - HOLD WATER' and signal the safety launch.
- In an eight or quad, the rower should remain close to the shell and not try to swim away, but tread water, moving no more than necessary.
- When the safety launch retrieves the rower, the Coach determines whether the rower will return to the shell.

Rower Injured Guidelines:

- Immediate command “Hold the Boat” or `WAY ENOUGH'.
- Signal launch if first aid needed.
- Know who on your crew has first aid training
 - the crew leader or coxswain is in charge until the crew member with first aid training takes charge.

Shell Damaged, but afloat, on the water Guidelines:

- Immediate command - `WAY ENOUGH'.
- Make adjustments or signal launch for assistance.

Shell Swamped Guidelines:

- A boat is swamped when the interior water reaches the gunwales.
- Immediate command - `WAY ENOUGH' or Hold the Boat.
- If rowers stay in the boat, the flotation in the bow and stern ends may cause the boat to break apart.
- If the boat is taking on excessive water, signal the safety launch and decide whether to get the rowers and coxswain out of the boat. This decision will depend on various factors, including water temperature
- If the decision is made to get out of the boat:

- Command - `UNTIE' (Rowers)
 - Be prepared to assist someone who is having difficulty releasing his or her feet from the foot stretchers.
 - Then unload by pairs - starting in the middle of the boat - as soon as possible to avoid damage to the boat.
 - Pairs should form `buddies' and keep watch on each other, Be certain all are accounted for. The Coxswain should buddy with the stern pair.
- If rescue is not imminent, take the following steps :
 - Remove oars or place them parallel to the shell. All persons should move to the ends of the shell (it is dangerous to roll a shell near riggers).
 - Roll the boat to form a more stable floatation platform, so rowers can either 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 water.
 - Do not attempt to roll the boat if rescue is on the way as a launch can shuttle rowers to the nearest shore.
 - If the ends of the shell have filled with water, they must be drained before

the boat can be removed from the water.
 - Remove the shell carefully to avoid injury or damage.

If a sculler falls out of the shell Guidelines:

- Entering the shell directly from the water can cause splashboard damage, so if re-entry is difficult, swim the boat to shore, lying on the stern, using the shell as a paddleboard.
- In cold weather, you can abandon your shell and lie on the stern deck of your buddy's boat to be taken to shore.
- Loss of muscle control can occur very quickly and dramatically in cold water - stern deck rescue may be your only option.

Shell Capsized Guidelines:

- Immediate command for shell - `UNTIE'.
- For all boats: be sure that all rowers and coxswain are accounted for.
- Stay with the boat until assistance arrives.
- Follow same procedures as for swamped shell.

Shell Broken and Sinking Guidelines:

- Immediate command - `UNTIE'.
- Get out of the boat and follow the same procedures as for a swamped shell.
- Do not leave floating boat.

Another Boat in Distress Guidelines:

- If a distress signal is seen and insufficient assistance is nearer that craft, maneuver your boat to the distressed boat.
 - Attempt to summon other launches or stable boats with distress signal.
- Call 911 or use Channel 16 on your Marine Radio
- Assist in any way that does not jeopardize the lives in your boat.

Rowers In the Water Guidelines:

- The launch should approach rowers in the water from the leeward side, keeping the propeller away from anyone in the water.
- The engine should be turned off as soon as contact with boat is made.
- Avoid overloading the launch.

On Water Repairs Guidelines:

- Shells should stay within hailing distance of the launch (or within radio contact).
 - The launch has been outfitted to provide assistance to rowers and/or the shell if needed.
- The tool box and coach's expertise are available for small equipment adjustments or breakdowns, which allow the shell to continue rowing after a short stop.
- If more serious needs arise, the launch and expert are there for rapid transportation.

Best Practices: Good Rowing

- The safety of life is more precious than a few more minutes of practice.
- One of The greatest dangers while on the water is collision caused by limited vision or carelessness - either yours or another boat's.
- Great care should be taken when rowing in darkness or near darkness.
- Take extra care to look and listen.
- Before launching and after landing, place all oars clear of the dock.
- Do not get too close to shore and known hazards.
- Only row in familiar waters.
- Make sure your lights are working and very visible. Spotlights in the launch are required while rowing in the dark and can be used to illuminate hazards, such as buoys and debris, and to signal other craft on the water, including barges and motorized craft.
- Warm-Up: Outings should gradually and safely build up to full intensity. Under no circumstances should a crew race or sprint upon initially entering the boat.
- Rowers in multi person boats should always be quiet and attentive to the Coxswain, Steerer, Coach or Crew Leader. All users of MVRC equipment must comply with instructions given by a Coach or Crew Leader.
- Keep oarlocks locked until the boat is securely alongside the dock.
- Keep at least one hand on the oar while on the water.
- Cool Down: Always `paddle-down' at the end of your workout. It is important to your health that you do not race up to the dock.

- Once the boat and oars have been stored, it is important to take another few minutes to go through your basic stretching exercises to heal any unnoticed strains or sprains that began during your row, thus eliminating soreness and unnecessary pain.

Best Practices: Commands

Before getting into the boat, be sure you know:

- Which seat and which side you are rowing- by number, and whether you are in the bow or stern pair/four.
- For rowers, the following basic rowing terminology:
 - BOW and STERN; PORT and STARBOARD
 - TIE IN and UNTIE; READY ALL , ROW; WAY ENOUGH; HOLD WATER
 - PORT (OR STARBOARD) TO ROW, STARBOARD (OR PORT) TO BACK
 - The terms WAY ENOUGH - HOLD WATER are used when the Coach, Crew

Leader or coxswain wants a crew to stop immediately because of danger.

Best Practices: Clothing

- Wear several layers of clothing in cold weather.
- Wear flexible, moisture-wicking fabrics.
- Avoid loose-fitting clothing in rowing shells, which can get struck in the tracks.

Best Practices: Coxswains and Scullers

- All coxswains and scullers should know the hazards and traffic patterns of the Monongahela River, and where practices are planned. (Appendix C -River Maps)
- Stay clear of bridge abutments, barges and other man-made or natural obstacles.
- Do not stop or turn under any bridges or near any such obstacles.
 - Make frequent checks on both sides of the boat and to the rear and listen for other river traffic.
 - Each rower is responsible and accountable for his/her own rigging, foot stretcher, seat, slide and blade, and must check to ensure that all equipment is functioning properly before leaving the dock.
- If in doubt, ask the Coach or Crew Leader.
 - Any deficiencies that may result in further damage to the equipment or endanger safe operation must be repaired before launching.
 - Check the following before launching:
- there is no damage to the hull, steering mechanisms, or structural support sections of the boat
 - the shell is equipped with a bow ball, heel tie-downs, and any other safety equipment appropriate to the shell

- you have the correct oar and the collar is tight
- nuts on the rigging are tight, the position of the foot stretcher and the smoothness of your slide are correct
- forward ends of the slides are blunt and will not gouge your calves
- you are wearing socks.
- **Shoes should not be worn in any seat of any boat that already has a set of shoes.**
- water bottles, gloves, tape, sun glasses, sun screen, extra clothing and hats are in the boat, if needed

Best Practices: Weather

- WEATHER CONDITIONS - be aware of them.
 - Always check the weather report before going out using one of the official MVRC Apps.
 - Watch for gathering clouds, changes in wind speed and direction, temperature changes, other boats returning home and debris.
 - **Do not row in whitecaps under any circumstances.**
- If sudden winds come up, return to the boathouse if the trip is safe (look for the calmest water), or take the boat to the nearest suitable shore and wait for the winds to die down.
- Try to minimize equipment damage, but remember that you are more valuable than your boat.
- FOG: Do not row in fog, unless your visibility is at least 100 yards.
 - Be sure to have land reference points in front and at least one shore in sight.
 - If fog sets in while you are on the water, move slowly and be prepared to stop quickly.
 - Follow the shore back to the boathouse, as far as possible.
 - In situations of poor visibility, use your sound-making device (horn, whistle) to advise other boats of your location. Use the following signals:

Type of Boat	Signal
Shells	1 prolonged blast followed by 2 short blasts at 2' intervals
Safety Launches in Motion	1 long blast every two minutes
Safety Launches stopped in the water	2 long blasts (with 2 seconds between blasts) every two minutes.

- Lightning: Do not row in an electrical storm.
 - If you are on the water and see lightning, hear thunder, or notice your hair standing on end with static electricity, head for the nearest shore.
 - If the storm is not yet upon you, stay close to the shore and quickly return to the boathouse.
 - If the storm is upon you, take the boat ashore and wait for the storm to pass.
 - Wait 15 minutes or more after hearing thunder before launching boats.
- Waves
 - When turning in waves, take particular care. Spend as little time as possible perpendicular to the current or wind direction, since the boat is very vulnerable in this position. Keep the boat absolutely level through the turn. If need be, use half the crew to set the boat level and the rest to turn.

- Rowers: If wakes are lower than the gunwale and widely spaced, continue to row without course adjustment.
- Deep and closely spaced wakes that are lower than the gunwale may be taken at a 90 degree angle.
- If approaching wakes are higher than the gunwale, the shell should be turned parallel to the wake to avoid having parts of the shell unsupported by the water (shells can split under these conditions).

■ Rowers should stop rowing and lean away from the approaching wake, lifting the gunwale on the wake side slightly.

APPENDICES

A. SAFETY MATRIX

Click the link below for the current Safety Matrix:

- [TRRA Rowing Safety Matrix](#)
- [TRRA Paddling Safety Matrix](#)

B. RIVERMAPS

Click here for the current River Maps: **LINKS COMING SOON.**

RIVER DIAGRAM OF RECOMMENDED LOCATIONS TO BEACH WATERCRAFT

- Heinz Field, 100 Art Rooney Avenue, Pgh, PA 15212 (40.4448 Lat, -80.0147 Long)
- Sharpsburg Island Marina (Allegheny River at Sharpsburg), 110 13th Street, Sharpsburg, PA 15215 (40.4933 Lat, -79.9295 Long)
- Newport Marina (Ohio River at West End Bridge), 929 W North Ave, Pgh, PA 15233 (Approx. 40.4503 Lat, -80.0305 Long)
- Southside Riverfront Park, Pittsburgh, PA 15203 (40.4324Lat, -79.9750 Long)
- South Shore Riverfront Park, 2701 S Water St, Pgh, PA 15203 (40.4293 Lat, -79.9647 Long)