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GENESEE WATERWAYS CENTER  
SAFETY MANUAL

2009 GWC SAFETY COMMITTEE

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## CHARTER AND IMPLEMENTATION

This manual is based on U.S. Coast Guard, US Rowing, and other organizations' guidelines, in addition to the extensive experience brought by members. Safety is the number one priority of all organizations and people who use the river and canal. This document is meant as a means to educate and provide the tools for safe use of the river. These guidelines are written for everyone's benefit. Furthermore, it is emphasized that all coaches should regularly review proper safety procedures with their personnel and ways to handle emergency situations of all kinds.

All GWC paddlers and rowers are expected to make themselves familiar with the guidelines and work to make sure others are aware of them, also. Consistent disregard for the guidelines may result in the loss of membership privileges with GWC.

The major programs and organizations shall be responsible for implementation and enforcement of these guidelines. Violations should be dealt with within the sanctions available. Recurring incidents evidencing blatant disregard of the guidelines may be referred to the GWC Executive Director for resolution which may include:

- Revocation of privileges (i.e. limitations on use of the facility or equipment)
- Denial of entry into sponsored regattas/races/events
- Termination of Lease/License Agreement

The GWC Program Directors and GWC Executive Director are responsible for rule interpretation. Violations of the safety guidelines must be reported to the Program Committee Chair of the GWC. If you have a suggestion for improving the safety of our operation, contact the GWC:

Phone: 585-328-3960

Email: [info@geneseewaterways.org](mailto:info@geneseewaterways.org)

Web: [www.geneseewaterways.org](http://www.geneseewaterways.org)

## GENERAL BOATHOUSE GUIDELINES

- Never run in the boathouse
- Do not step over a boat
- Sculling members must sign out by using the log book in the Small Boathouse and sign in upon return
- Sweep rowing members and programs must keep track of who is out on the water and note the time the boat(s) return
- Members at Lock 32 must sign out using the log book and sign in upon return

## RIVER TRAFFIC PATTERNS AND RIVER HAZARDS

For Kayaks, Canoes, Outrigger Canoes, and Rowing Shells

- All boats must be launched facing upstream
- Boats should always check for traffic before entering into or crossing a waterway
- Boats must travel between the center arch of the pedestrian bridge
- All boats travelling toward each other should pass port to port
- All boats should keep their starboard side closest to shore
- Individuals have the responsibility to watch where his/her boat is going in order to avoid collisions
  - Slow moving boats should yield to faster boats by shifting their course to the starboard and allowing the overtaking boat to pass port to port
- Larger boats have the right of way due to their decreased maneuverability
- Boats should not turn upstream from bridges unless they are at least 400 meters away. Swift currents can pull boats into bridge abutments very quickly.

## GUIDELINES FOR ROWERS AND PADDLERS

- All GWC rowers & paddlers must complete and return a liability waiver to GWC each year
- Notify your coach/instructor if you have any medical conditions that could affect your participation. Take precautionary medications in the boat with you on the water.
- Perform an equipment check prior to launching; do not use a boat/piece of equipment if it is missing any parts or has any non-functioning parts
  - Make note of any equipment issues on the Communication Report Form located in the Small Boathouse, Large Boathouse, or Lock 32 Site Host Desk
  - All participants must provide lights, at their own expense, for paddling or rowing before sunrise or after sunset. The lights shall consist of a white light at the stern and a red and green light at the bow.
- No participant should ever leave a floatation device to swim to shore.
- Be aware of weather forecasts and conditions; do not go out on the water in unsafe conditions.
- When a rowing shell is being overtaken, yell "look ahead" loudly until you know you have been heard.
- No rower under the age of 14 shall be allowed to row unescorted by an adult.

## ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR COACHES

It is important to have a well-equipped and working safety launch whenever providing any instruction. Coaches must have the necessary training and be certified in First Aid, CPR, and Boater Safety.

It is the responsibility of any coach boat to provide assistance to any capsized boat, even if from another sport, or a pleasure boat. Coaches are reminded to stop at a safe distance and offer assistance. Approach with caution and in a controlled manner.

Coaches should make sure that for each rower or coxswain they have on hand a record of the following, which should also be maintained in the GWC office:

- Name, date of birth
- Address
- Phone Number
- Emergency Contact name and phone number
- Height, weight, pertinent medical information

All crews need to have a Safety Launch on the water with rowing shells. A coach sitting in the coxswain's seat does not count as a Safety Launch! Occupants of a coach's launch should be kept to a minimum. One or two extra people in addition to one coach should be the maximum for a safety launch (14'). Preferably, launches should be large enough to hold all members of a given crew in the event of an emergency.

It is recommended the coach should be wearing a life jacket or PFD at all times while on the water. In addition, each launch should have the following safety items:

- PFD/life jacket for each person in the launch
- PFD/life jacket for each member of the crew on the water
- A megaphone
- First Aid Kit
- Signaling Device (flare or horn)
- Tools
- Water bailer
- 50 ft safety line
- Fire extinguisher
- Cell phone (to call 9-1-1)
- Paddle

## [ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR COACHES – CONTINUED]

Operators of launches should have an uninterrupted 360-degree view at all times. Use of heavy ballast in the bow of the launch (log, tire with rim, cinder blocks, passenger, etc) can be used to trim the launch so it rides level. Coaches need to be aware of the wake their launch creates.

Additional safety considerations for coaches include:

- Coaches should limit distance across all boats in a practice to 2 abreast
- Coaches teaching a group sculling lesson with 5 or more sculls on the water must use a coaching launch
  - For all novice sculling group lessons, a coaching launch must be used
- Coaches who wish to stop and work with their crew(s) should only do so in areas where they are not impeding the flow of traffic
- Coaches must know the swimming abilities of all participants; all participants must be able to swim to shore, if necessary, under all river conditions
- When the air is below 40 degree F or the water is below 50 degree F, a launch must stay within 100 yards of all boats.
- All launch drivers shall keep their boat's wash to a minimum when passing other boats and shall proceed past the boathouse slips at idling speeds with no wash
- When the water temperature is 50°F or less, there should be a minimum of one coaching launch for every two 8's in a given practice (Crew).
- Rowing Coaches are advised to purchase a copy of US Rowing's Safety Video, and show it each year to all rowers (Crew).

## GUIDELINES FOR SCULLERS

Scullers should select a rowing shell that is appropriate for his or her skill level. When in doubt, consult the GWC Rowing Director or a GWC Rowing Instructor for advice. All new sculling members are required to watch the US Rowing Safety Video.

- Individual members are not permitted to provide instruction using GWC equipment.
- It is expected that all sculling members be competent swimmers and be able to successfully complete the swimming skills listed in Appendix E.
  - GWC reserves the right to test individual members should a concern arise regarding his/her swimming competency for safety reasons.
- New members must complete an orientation with the Rowing Director or a designated GWC Board Member to demonstrate rowing competency prior to putting on the water; this could include performing a flip-test. See Appendix F.
  - GWC reserves the right to require new, novice sculling members using GWC equipment to enroll in an instructional sculling program to gain rowing competence prior to sculling independently.
- It is very important that all those who scull from this facility sign in and sign out using the name or number located on the boat you are using.
  - Private boat owners must sign out and sign back in indicating the boat type.
- In the case that a boat is damaged or someone is injured, either on the water or in the boathouse, always fill out a Communication Report Form.

## RESERVING A BOAT FOR ONSITE OR OFFSITE USE:

- Only GWC members can reserve boats.
- Instructors may have preference in reserving any boat when needed for instruction.
- Reservations are made on a first-come-first-serve basis. A reservation form must be filled out for any advanced reservation, whether for onsite or offsite use.

## GUIDELINES FOR EQUIPMENT

- All gasoline containers must be kept outside of the boathouse in fireproof cabinets.
- Fire lanes (the last 4 feet of each end of the boathouse) must be kept clear at all times. No launches or other equipment are to be left in this space at any time.
- All rowing shells must be equipped with emergency releases for foot stretchers.
- All rowing shells must be equipped with a bow ball.
- If damage occurs at any time to a GWC boat, it must be immediately returned to the boathouse. The coach or individual using the boat must report the damage on a Communication Report Form.
  - Equipment not fit for use shall be clearly marked “UNSAFE – DO NOT USE” by GWC staff.
- Each launch must be marked with the name of the owner/organization.

## LAUNCHING AND LANDING BOATS

- Crews that are landing on the dock have priority over crews wishing to launch. This is especially true in inclement weather.
- Landing boats should use all available dock space; they should not wait for the very end of the dock to become open if there is space further up the dock. Participants should endeavor to walk their boat up so that other participants can land unless asked by a coach not to (i.e. another boat is going around them to fill open dock space above them).
- All boats should take not more than two minutes at the dock once the boat is ready for launching, if there are other crews waiting to launch.
- There is no swimming off the docks at any time for any occasion.
- Members, schools and guests are expected to spend as little time as necessary on the docks while launching and landing.

## COLD WEATHER ROWING

Rowing when the water temperature falls below 50 degrees should be done with great consideration.

The following measures are suggested when working out on the water in cold weather:

- Four Oar Rule: The boat must have a minimum of 4 oars on the water, or
- The Buddy System: Individuals should go out in pairs.
- Wear an inflatable, compact life vest or wetsuit.
- Stay closer to shore.
- A noisemaker of some kind should be carried in each boat and be attached in some manner so as not to be lost if the boat capsizes.
- A well-prepared safety launch should be nearby during cold-weather rowing.

The only true safety device or practice other than common sense is a support/coaching launch. In the event of an emergency, a well-prepared safety launch can assist the individuals in question and transport them to safety, and even then hypothermia is an issue. All individuals should ask themselves before launching if being on the water is the best and only way to train. See Appendix A for information on Hypothermia and other weather related emergencies.

## INCLEMENT WEATHER

Rowers and paddlers should use common sense in the face of 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. Groups should not launch if such conditions exist or are seriously threatening.

### **Wind**

Coaches and rowers should keep in mind that often times it is easy to launch from the dock but much harder to land in windy conditions. This is especially true with novices and small boats. Waves or swells generated by strong winds can quickly swamp a crew.

### **Heavy Rains & Fast Currents**

After heavy periods of rain, currents can quickly increase in speed and strength. The river usually will rise over a period of 1-3 days after the cessation of precipitation and recede in about the same amount of time barring further rain. At these times extreme caution should be taken. Special attention should also be paid to all bridge arches as currents are accelerated as they pass through them. Lastly, with heavy rains and currents on the Genesee River come heavy debris in the form of large logs, tires, and water-logged farm animals that also affect the canal. Hitting these items will damage the boat and could cause capsize.

### **Lightning Storms**

Lightning storms are very dangerous. Crews should return immediately to the dock, or proceed immediately to shore if the boathouse is too distant. There does not have to be rain or thunder to have lightning.

### **Fog**

Fog obviously limits visibility, but also mutes sounds. If caught in fog, it is recommended that crews proceed with extreme caution and appropriately slow speeds in the direction of the boathouse. If the fog is too extreme it may be better to sit still. Be sure to make some noise so that others on the river can be alerted to your presence.

**GENESSEE WATERWAYS CENTER  
COMMUNICATION REPORT FORM**

Date of report: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_ AM / PM

Nature of Incident:  Personal Injury  Equipment damage/malfunction  Facility Maintenance

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of incident: \_\_\_\_\_ Time incident occurred: \_\_\_\_\_ AM / PM

Person reporting incident or concern: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone: \_\_\_\_\_ CELL / HOME / WORK

Describe what happened:


Location of incident or damage: \_\_\_\_\_

Individuals involved (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Actions taken at the time of the incident:


Follow up requested:


**GWC Contacts:**

Rowing Director/GVP Boathouses:

Paul Bardotz cell 585-329-3215

Executive Director: Nicole Fulle cell 585-749-9333

**EMERGENCY: CALL 9-1-1**

Kayak Director/Lock 32 Whitewater Park:

Andy Cook cell 585-747-8478

Follow up action: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_ GWC Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX A: WEATHER-RELATED SAFETY EMERGENCIES

### COLD-RELATED WEATHER EMERGENCIES

#### Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition that occurs when the temperature of the human body is lowered to a dangerous point due to exposure to cold and/or wet conditions. Cold temperatures and wet conditions work together to pull heat away from the body, lowering the body's core temperature. Even in mild conditions, the addition of rain or submersion in cold water can sufficiently reduce body warmth to trigger hypothermic conditions in the body. A person's condition can degrade rapidly, impairing breathing and coordination, making it impossible to swim or keep one's head above water. Emergency action needs to be taken no matter what the level of hypothermia.

#### Early Hypothermia

- Symptoms: Rapid shivering, numbness, and loss of strength and coordination, semi-consciousness.
- Action:
  - Maintain open airway.
  - Transfer to a warm environment as soon as possible.
  - Remove wet clothing.
  - Use blankets to help warm individual, or if available, a warm shower.
  - Warm torso area first.
  - Seek medical attention.

#### Profound Hypothermia

- Symptoms: Person will be pale, stiff, and cold. Unresponsive to stimuli, and possibly unconscious. Little or no cardiac or respiratory activity will be present.
- Action:
  - Call for emergency help immediately!
  - Move or manipulate as gently as possible.
  - Prevent further heat loss, but DO NOT attempt to re-warm.
  - Maintain open airway, and activate EMS procedures.

### HEAT-RELATED EMERGENCIES

Higher temperatures and high humidity can lead to heat related illnesses that coaches and rowers need to keep in mind. As humidity rises, the body's ability to cool off through sweating is diminished since evaporation is limited. The best way to avoid heat related injuries is to practice at cooler times of the day: early morning or late afternoon. The body needs time to acclimate to increased temperatures. Intake of fluids is also key and should be encouraged. Dehydration further impairs the body's ability to cool off. There are two major related heat illnesses to be aware of: heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

#### Heat Exhaustion

Early Symptoms: heavy sweating, cramps, tiredness, weakness, malaise, mild decrease in performance.

- Action: Rest and fluid replacement.

Advanced Symptoms: profuse sweating, lack of muscle coordination, impaired judgment, and emotional changes.

- Action: If there is mild temperature elevation, an ice pack may be used to help cool the body to normal temperatures. Several days rest may be necessary and rehydration is a priority.

#### Heat Stroke

Symptoms:

- Confusion, nausea, vomiting, and seizures.
- The victim loses consciousness.
- Body temperature rises as high as 106.
- Skin is dry and clammy.

Action:

- Get medical help immediately!
- Remove person from direct sunlight, cool with damp towel

## APPENDIX B: CAPSIZE AND PERSON OVERBOARD PROCEDURES

**NOTE:** It is the responsibility of any coach boat to provide assistance to any capsized boat, even if not from their sport. Coaches are reminded to stop at a safe distance and offer assistance. Approach with caution and in a controlled manner. Be aware of your prop!

All crewmembers should be fully aware of what actions to take when a crew swamps, flips, or capsizes. ***In any of these events the crew should remain with the shell!*** The shell will float (an important reason to close bow and stem ports before going on the water). Furthermore the oars will act as flotation devices. If for some reason the shell sinks below the surface, the shell should be rolled so the bottom is facing the sky, as this traps air underneath the shell and increases buoyancy. ***At no time should any crewmember leave the boat to swim to shore!*** A short swim can be far longer than it appears due to currents, wind, water temperature, or personal fatigue.

Stay calm. The first thing that should be done in a team boat is for the coxswain or bow person to get head counts to make sure all rowers are accounted for. The crew, while holding onto the shell, should attempt to get the attention of other crews, or coaches on the water. Waving and making as much noise as is necessary to attract attention. If no crews or launches are on the water nearby, attracting the attention of people on shore is the next step.

If the water and air temperatures are low, then the crewmembers should move along the shell and huddle together in pairs near the middle of the shell. Effort should be made to keep as much of the body out of the water as possible. A minimum of movement is key to retaining body heat. Constantly check on crewmates and maintain one-on-one communication.

Procedures:

- Stay calm.
- Stay with the boat.
- Take a head count.
- Pair up and keep communication with one another.
- Attract attention of launches, crews, or people on shore.
- Keep as much of your body out of the water as possible.
- Wait for help.

In the case of a person overboard, it is up to the ejected individual to stay below the surface of the water until the boat has passed (this avoids getting hit in the head by a fast moving rigger/paddle/oar). The crew should stop rowing/paddling and hold water immediately so they can lend assistance. The crew should get the attention of the coach's launch while the individual treads water. In the event that a launch is not nearby the crew can back up to the individual in question so the he or she can use the boat as a flotation device. It is also feasible to pass an oar or paddle to the ejected individual, using the oar as a flotation device. Once removed from the water, the individual should be evaluated to determine if he or she is fit to continue or if a medical emergency is present.

## **APPENDIX C: MISSING PERSON EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (EAP)**

1. Survey the scene. Determine where the Missing Person was last seen and whether he or she was distressed, active, or passive. Call 9-1-1 to report the Missing Person(s).
2. Provide details of the Missing Person(s) to the 9-1-1 dispatcher.
3. Notify GWC staff of the Missing Person(s). Designate someone to the park entrance by the main road to flag down the Emergency Responders.
4. Designate someone to gather information from witnesses.
5. If the scene/water is safe, perform a search.
6. Follow up with the GWC Program Director within 24 hours to notify him or her of the situation.
7. A GWC Communication Report Form must be completed and filed with the GWC within 48 hours.

### **GWC Boathouse Address**

149 Elmwood Avenue  
Rochester, NY 14611  
585-328-3960

- Located behind the City of Rochester's Genesee Valley Pool and Ice Rink Complex

### **Lock 32 Whitewater Park**

2797 Clover Street  
Pittsford, NY 14534  
585-586-4330

- Located south of the Erie Canal and north of Jefferson Road, on the west side of Clover Street. Same entrance for DOT.

## **APPENDIX D: LOCK 32 WHITEWATER PARK SAFETY GUIDELINES**

All participants paddling in the whitewater course must abide by the following:

1. Be competent swimmers, with the ability to swim underwater.
2. Wear a correctly-fitted PFD.
3. Wear a solid, correctly-fitted helmet.
4. Abide by the American Whitewater Safety Code.
5. Wear approved footwear.
6. Paddle below the spillway and take out before the Clover Street culvert.
7. Respond to warning or emergency signals as notified by GWC staff at Lock 32 Whitewater Park.
8. Report all incidents that occur at Lock 32 Whitewater Park to GWC staff.

## APPENDIX E: SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR CANOE & KAYAK RENTALS

- The renter must be at least 18 years of age to rent a canoe or kayak.
- No more than one child under 13 years of age per canoe.
- EVERYONE MUST WEAR A PFD/LIFEJACKET. Cushions are NOT a substitute. Correctly fitted lifejackets must be worn in canoes and kayaks at all times, when leaving the canoe/kayak, as well as entering the canoe/kayak.
- No more than 3 people in a canoe.
- Horseplay will not be tolerated. The Genesee Waterways Center reserves the right to terminate a rental agreement at any time, as the result of a violation of rules and regulations, or the Renter's inability to control the canoe. In these instances, there will be no refund of rental fee paid, less damages.
- All persons must wear shoes while launching and removing canoes from the water. Take shoes with you in the canoe. The Genesee Waterways Center will not be responsible for any injuries.
- **LIMITED USE OF GENESEE RIVER:** do not paddle north (toward the City) of the Ford Street Bridge.
- Person or persons renting canoes or kayaks and all accessories assume(s) full responsibility for any personal or property damages directly or indirectly caused during the rental time or as a result of the rental of these items, whether on the site or removed from the site.
- ALCOHOLIC beverages are NOT permitted in canoes/kayaks or in the park areas.

## **APPENDIX F: SWIMMING SKILLS**

All rowing & sculling members are expected to meet the standards below for swimming.

1. Swim 25 yards non-stop fully clothed (no shoes).
2. Put on a PFD correctly while in the water.
3. Tread water for 5 minutes while fully clothed (no shoes).

## **APPENDIX G: NEW & VISITING MEMBER SKILLS CHECKLIST**

All new rowing & sculling members using GWC equipment must be able to demonstrate rowing competency to the Rowing Director or designated GWC Board Member prior to putting on the water. Members may be asked to perform the following skills test:

- Carry the set of oars to the docks without dragging them or hitting objects on the way and carefully set them on the dock.
- Check the rowing shell for any damage or missing parts prior to use. Tighten any loose nuts and bolts. Make sure there is a bow ball.
- Correctly and safely remove the rowing shell from the rack and carry it to the dock.
- Slowly and carefully place the rowing shell in the water next to the dock.
- The member may ask for assistance from another person to complete tasks 1 and 2; if the individual cannot complete tasks 1 and 2 independently, he or she has the responsibility for making arrangements to obtain assistance when he or she rows.
- Launch from the dock and row to the pedestrian bridge, turn the rowing shell, row past GWC and safely dock the boat.
- The member may be required to demonstrate that he or she can successfully right the rowing shell from an upside down position and get back in the boat.

**APPENDIX H: RIVER TRAFFIC PATTERNS**

