

SAFETY POLICY = WRC's Commitment - SAFETY PLAN = WRC's Instructions

Willamette Rowing Club - Safety Policy: *Our Shared Commitment to Safety*

Approved by the WRC Board of Directors on 12/17/2025

1. Purpose & Commitment

The Willamette Rowing Club (WRC) is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all members and guests. Because rowing takes place in a dynamic environment with inherent risks such as cold water, variable weather, and unpredictable river traffic and conditions, WRC prioritizes safety by upholding a culture of shared responsibility for safety. This includes maintaining high safety standards to mitigate risk and prevent injuries and incidents to the extent possible; aligning with USRowing, Oregon State Marine Board, Federal Regulations, Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS), and Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR); adhering to the Safe Systems approach which acknowledges that humans make mistakes; and continually improving club safety through review, training, and incident reporting.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all WRC members, coaches, coxswains, launch drivers, volunteers, and guests; all club facilities and property including docks, boathouse, rowing shells, launches, trailers, and other equipment; all club activities including coached and uncoached practices, independent rowing, regattas, equipment handling, and travel.

3. Roles & Responsibilities

All WRC Members shall:

- Attend WRC's Annual Safety Meeting or, if unable to do so, meet individually with a Safety Committee member.
- Review and familiarize themselves with WRC's Safety Policy, Safety Plan, and Emergency Action Plan (EAP), and sign acknowledgement of having done so annually.
- Understand how to assess weather, river conditions, debris, and visibility to determine whether it is safe to row.
- Confirm ability to swim and self-rescue according to WRC standards.
- Report hazards, equipment damage, and incidents via the appropriate forms.
- Alert the coach of any medical condition that could impair their ability to row safely or require special attention.

WRC Board of Directors shall:

- Approve and oversee the WRC Safety Plan and Emergency Action Plan.
- Appoint a Safety Committee and designate a Safety Officer/Lead.
- Review incident reports deemed serious and ensure corrective action is taken.

WRC Safety Committee shall:

- Review the Safety Policy, Safety Plan, and Emergency Action Plan annually and provide updates.
- Plan and schedule the annual safety meeting.
- Plan and schedule swim and flip tests annually or as needed.
- Ensure required safety equipment including AEDs, First Aid supplies, Emergency Response equipment is maintained and that inflatable PFD CO₂ cylinders are not expired.
- Review all incident reports and share significant findings with the Board and coaching staff.

WRC Coaches shall:

- Be familiar with the Emergency Action Plan and best practices for emergency calls and communication.
- Assess conditions before launching and provide safety briefings when appropriate.
- Train safety launch drivers and ensure launches are in working condition.
- Maintain CPR/AED and basic first-aid certification.
- Enforce WRC traffic patterns and safety guidelines.
- Stop or modify practice when conditions become unsafe.

WRC Launch Drivers shall:

- Be trained according to WRC standards on assisting athletes that have capsized or otherwise become incapacitated due to injury or a medical event, including non-WRC individuals.
- Operate launches in compliance with federal, state and local laws.
- Not operate a Safety Launch if physically unfit, such as injured or recovering from major surgery or with broken or sprained bones.

Willamette Rowing Club - Safety Plan: *How WRC Ensures Safety.*

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1. Specific Member Responsibilities

Logging Boats

All WRC Members shall log boats “out” and “in.” The coxswain, single sculler, or bow seat rower is responsible for compliance.

Equipment Damage

All rowers shall submit an [Equipment Damage Report in FitClub](#) if they observe or cause damage (even if the damage has been reported to the Equipment Manager verbally). If damage happens on the water, the coxswain, single sculler, or bow seat rower is responsible for filling the report and, if the shell is unfit to row, tagging it with a high-viz colored ‘Do Not Row’ tag and indicating ‘not rowable’ in the electronic report.

Swim Certification

All members shall demonstrate their ability to: 1) Float or tread water for ten minutes, 2) put on a life jacket while floating or treading water, and 3) comfortably swim 50 - 200 yards. New or returning members may temporarily self-certify via a waiver provided they agree to *test at their earliest opportunity*.

WRC members who do not pass the swim test shall wear a personal flotation device when rowing in small boats (1x, 2x, 2-) when there is not a safety launch on the water.

Coaches may require any athlete to re-test at any time.

Upholding WRC's Culture of Safety

Safety Time Out

All members may call a “Safety Time Out” when or if they perceive unsafe conditions. **A Safety Time Out** is a non-punitive and temporary suspension of all activity to assess the situation and ensure safety before proceeding.

Incident Reports

All members shall file an Incident Report for any safety-related incident that occurs on or off the water. Examples of incidents include: Person overboard or swamped, flipped rowing shell, any collision between two or more boats, any type of personal injury occurring on or off the water.

The Safety Committee shall review all Incident Reports and share with the Board of Directors and coach as appropriate. Non-punitive corrective action will be suggested by the Safety Committee and approved and implemented by the Coach and/or Board.

2. Independent Rowing Standards

An independent rower is any WRC member that uses a club-owned shell outside of organized practices with no coach or safety launch on the water. In addition to requirements for all WRC rowers,

Independent rowers shall:

- Check out the boat on FitClub. Be approved by Captains or Coach to take out, as appropriate.
- Assess river conditions based on WRC Safety Matrix, USGS data and a visual assessment.
- Be familiar with self-rescue techniques.
- Ensure at least one charged cell phone in the boat [link to waterproof cell phone cases]
- Should wear high-vis clothing.

3. Independent Club Singles Rowing Requirements

In addition to adhering to all guidelines for independent rowers, WRC members rowing club singles independently shall: 1) have passed a flip test in a similar size/class of rowing shell within the past two years, and 2) have demonstrated their ability to handle the boat without assistance including safely removing it from the rack, carrying it to the dock without incident, maneuvering comfortably on the water (turn 180 degrees, back it), docking successfully, and returning boat to boathouse rack.

Club singles need to be rowed with a launch or PFDs under the following conditions. **See Appendix 2 - Safety Matrix:**

- Water temperature under 50F
- River velocity over 1.5 fps

4. Traffic Pattern & Sharing the River

All coxswains and bow seat rowers shall ensure their rowing shell is closer to their starboard side shore, stay on the correct side of buoys in Milwaukee Bay and be vigilant of other recreational river users such as swimmers, SUPers, outrigger canoers etc. Coaches and safety launch drivers will assist.

5. Safety Launch

WRC safety launches enhance athlete safety by: 1) assisting all WRC shells in adhering to WRC's established river pattern; 2) alerting WRC rowers to the presence of debris and presence of other recreational users such as swimmers, outrigger canoers, power boaters etc.; and 3) providing assistance in emergency situations to WRC rowers as well as other non-WRC recreational river users.

Ideally, crews should be within the line of sight of the supervising launch. The WRC safety matrix (see Appendix 2) provides further clarity on when, depending on specific weather and river conditions, this is imperative.

When the WRC coach is driving the only launch on the water, they are also the safety launch driver.

Safety Launch Drivers Shall:

- Have a valid [OR or WA Boaters Education Card](#).
- Maintain CPR/AED and basic first-aid certification or, if not already certified, obtain as soon as club is able to offer that training.
- Participate in WRC Safety Launch Training (see below)
- Carry all required emergency equipment (see below) and understand how to use it.

- Wear a PFD and ensure other launch occupants wear a PFD while on the water per [State](#) and [Federal Law](#). Carry enough PFDs for the number of athletes under their supervision.
- Refrain from filming or texting while operating the launch.
- Report any incident or defect associated with the use, storage, or handling of the launch.
- Know best evacuation points on the river and understand that the best evacuation point may not be the one closest to where the incident occurred. **See Appendix 2 for River Evacuation Points**

The Head Coach will ensure all new launch drivers are fully trained, be familiar with best evacuation points on the river, and have practiced on-the-water response procedures based on likely scenarios including: athlete ejection/immersion, with a focus on cold water and/or injured athletes; boat capsizing; on the water medical emergencies, including cardiac events, seizures, and cold/hot weather emergencies; and major boat damage or collision rendering shells unrowable. Training may include watching 1) US Rowing Safety Video “Coaches and Administrators” section and 2) University of Washington *Water Emergency Training* videos.

Required Safety Launch Equipment

- Emergency numbers including Multnomah County River Patrol, Portland Coast Guard Station, Portland Fire and Rescue
- Map with evacuation point list and specific directions for 911 operators.
- PFDs
- Cell phone
- Lights affixed when low light (state law OAR 250-021-0030)
- Basic tool kit to make small repairs (wrenches, tape, nuts, washers etc)
- First aid kit with emergency blankets
- Lifeline
- Bailer
- Rescue Strap
- Whistle – or other noise maker
- Paddles with proper oar locks
- Tow line

See Appendix 1 for WRC’s Emergency Action Plan

6. Trailering

Trailer drivers and spotters must be approved by the Trailer Committee through observed testing and demonstration of procedural guidelines for safe trailering. Trailer must have safety check performed each time it is used, supervised and checked off by approved trailer driver. Trailer loading needs to be coordinated by an approved trailer driver following WRC’s guidelines, and all equipment needs to be double checked prior to trailer departure.

7. Weather and River Conditions

During coached practices, the Coach shall decide whether conditions are safe for rowing. WRC members who opt to row independently, without a coach or safety launch on the water, shall make a well-informed decision based on WRC’s safety matrix, USGS data, and a visual assessment from the dock including:

- Wind - Do not row in high wind or whitecaps
- Fog - Do not row if visibility is less than 100 yards or the Sellwood Bridge is not visible. If fog develops while on the water, rowers shall return to the dock as quickly as reasonably hugging the shoreline closely.
- Lightning/Thunder – Never row in lightning or thunder. US Rowing guidelines state rowers must wait at least 30 minutes to launch after lightning or thunder has been sighted or heard. If on the

water and lightning is seen, crews should head to the nearest shore or dock. If the storm is not yet upon the shell, follow close to shoreline and return to the boathouse as quickly as possible. If the storm is upon the shell, take the shell ashore and wait for the storm to pass.

- Hot and Cold weather – Both heat and cold should be taken seriously. A cold water video can be found [here](#) and cold water facts [here](#) . See Safety Matrix for rowing restrictions based on cold water.
 - Air Quality
 - Water Level and current. Rowers should not launch when any of the following conditions is present. Information tracked by [USGS](#): 1) Current speed above 2.5 fps, 2) Flow above 100k CFS, 3) presence of whitecaps, 4) presence of excessive debris.
- 7 **Low Light Policy** Lights are required when rowing between sunset and sunrise per state law ORS 830.225 and Administrative Rule OAR 250-021-0030. Any WRC member choosing to row at this time, whether as part of a coached practice or independently, must affix lights properly to both bow and stern. Private boat owners must supply their own lights and adhere to all legal requirements. All rowers are strongly encouraged to wear high vis clothing in low light conditions and as a general rule to be more visible to other river users.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Emergency Action Plan

Each emergency situation or incident is different and, given this, the specific actions taken by the coach or safety launch driver on the scene will be guided by their best judgment, based on the unique circumstances. The following scenarios have been shared with WRC by Lewis and Clark and are meant to be probable best practice, but, again, coaches and safety launch drivers must be adaptable with the primary goal of protecting athlete safety.

Scenarios

Athlete ejection/immersion into cold water and/or injured athletes.

- The priority is to get the athlete(s) who are in the water, out of the water as soon as possible.
- If multiple athletes are in the water, life jackets should be distributed to all prior to the rescue of any.
- If possible, instruct athletes to stay with their boat and hold on for floatation.
- Once athletes are in the launch, they should be evaluated for injury/cold water immersion concerns.
- If athlete(s) are uninjured and temperatures are warm enough they may be returned to the boat to continue practice. If injured or potentially hypothermic the focus shall be on treating or evacuating the athlete(s).

Boat capsize.

- Small boat (single/pair/double) capsize can be treated similarly to athlete immersion above.
- Big boat capsize often requires additional assistance. Prior to retrieving any athletes should be instructed to remain with the boat and lifejackets should be distributed.
- Once all athletes are accounted for and have life jackets they should be evacuated to the launch (taking care not to overload the launch) and, if needed, to the nearest shoreline.
- In extreme conditions (cold/multiple boat capsize/etc) EMS shall be contacted for evacuation assistance. The number of athletes involved should be communicated clearly.
- All athletes must be safe on shore before beginning to ferry athletes back to the boathouse or evacuation point, and all athletes must be safely on their way back to the boathouse or being transported by EMS (if needed) before any equipment retrieval occurs.

On the water medical emergency including cardiac events, seizures, and cold/hot weather emergencies.

- In the case of a major medical emergency EMS should be contacted as soon as possible.
- The responding coach or launch driver shall make the judgment as to whether it's better to remain in place while EMS responds or attempt to evacuate rowers and meet EMS at an evacuation point.
- Rower(s) may be removed to the launch and transported to an evacuation point. The safety launch driver may elect to bring along another athlete as an aid and/or to send along with an athlete being transported to EMS.
- Remaining crews/athletes shall be instructed to either shelter in place or proceed safely back to the boathouse.

Major boat damage and/or collision.

- Priority shall always be given to athletes - they must be evaluated for injury and/or extracted from the water (see above)—before concerns over equipment.
- Only after determining that all athletes are safe shall boat damage be evaluated and boats either returned back to the boathouse or continued to be used for practice.
- If boats are deemed not rowable proceed with athlete evacuation per 'capsize' protocol above.
- If a non-WRC boat was involved in the collision, safety launch drivers shall document registration numbers and, if possible, contact information (name, address, phone number).
- If a non-WRC boat is involved in a collision or situation involving injury and/or damage over \$2000 (estimated) the Multnomah County River Patrol shall be informed and an accident report filed with the Oregon State Marine Board.

Major weather events, including high winds, lighting, and fog.

- In the event of major weather changes from the forecast safety launch drivers shall use their best judgment to protect the safety of the athletes and equipment.
- In sudden high winds boats shall proceed directly into or away from the wind to the dock and/or nearest safe shoreline to evacuate. Avoid working across the wind to avoid swamping.
- In the event of nearby lightning crews should evacuate to the nearest shoreline and get out of the water. If lightning is seen/thunder is heard some distance away, crews should proceed back to the dock directly and evacuate to the nearest shoreline if it gets closer.
- The rule of thumb with lightning is 'within 30 miles, stay off the water for 30 minutes'. Use of a cell phone lightning detector app can help facilitate making decisions under these situations.
- If fog rises unexpectedly crews should proceed slowly back to the dock, following the shoreline. Keep all crews together and in view of each other and the launch.

Encounters with non-WRC boats.

- If WRC launch drivers encounter a non-WRC boat or person experiencing an emergency they shall attempt to render aid; however,
- The safety of our athletes and coaches shall not be compromised in rendering that aid.
- In many cases the most appropriate action will be to have the crews stay in place or (if safe) proceed back to the boathouse while the responding coach contacts 911 to summon professional help.

After the resolution of any emergency situation, even one with no lasting concerns, an Incident Report should be filed and the safety committee with input from the WRC Board should conduct an internal review of the response and determine whether any improvements could be made

Preferred River Evacuation Points and Communication Protocol

This information has been shared with WRC by Lewis and Clark.

Preferred Evacuation Points are extremely important to understand. These are locations that ensure the most rapid response for EMS crews. When contacting emergency responders it is extremely important to communicate the exact evacuation point and as much detail about the incident as possible (type of medical event or injury, number of people needing assistance, etc.)

1. **Fire Station 21**- "We are at the boat dock at Fire Station 21 at the west end of SE Madison Street."
2. **Willamette Park**- "We are at the boat ramp at Willamette Park on SW Macadam Ave."
3. **Milwaukee Bay Park**- "We are at the boat ramp at Milwaukee Bay Park at the west end of SE Washington Street in downtown Milwaukee."

Alternate Evacuation Points- "Meet-Me" locations in cases where EMS will have time to get to these spots before we could get to the preferred evacuation points.

1. **Duckworth Dock**- "We are at the Duckworth Dock on the Eastbank Esplanade"
2. **Portland Rowing Club**- "We are at the bottom of the ramp at the Portland Rowing Club houseboat moorage at the west end of SE Harney Street."
3. **Oak Grove Blvd Boat Ramp**- "We are at the Boat Ramp at the East end of SE Oak Grove Blvd in Fair Oaks."
4. **George Rogers Park**- "We are at the beach at George Rogers Park at the east end of Green Street in Lake Oswego."

Appendix 2 - WRC Safety Matrix

