

# *Sculling Safety*



*Bair Island Aquatic Center*

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# Sculling Safety at BIAC

Knowledge and planning are the best tools for rowing safety. The biggest threats to safety in the act of rowing are drowning, hypothermia, and collision from other craft.

Knowledge is gained through experience, and experience a good waterman should have in order to properly plan outings is:

1. the ability to handle your shell expertly (backing, stopping, rowing, turning)
2. the ability to swim in open water confidently
3. full immersion/swimming in cold water (~ 50 degrees) (without wetsuit)
4. practice in boat recovery technique.

Rowing in Redwood Harbor is relatively very safe. The water temps rarely drop below 50 and the winter air temps tend to hover in the 45-60 range. If you were to fall out of your boat near the wires, you could get back in, row home and be very uncomfortable but not in danger. There are some excellent materials now that allow you to be wet and stay warm, combinations of poly, and wool knits. Wetsuits are certainly helpful IN the water, but are too hot out of the water for rowing if you are doing any work.

There are two aspects to consider for safe rowing at BIAC. One aspect is your own personal safety. One person's risk analysis will not be the same as another's. The other aspect to consider is the sport of Rowing itself. Rowing is given exemptions to (personal flotation device) PFD requirements largely because of its safety record. The majority of rowing sessions are supervised, and that there is an assumption of athletic ability when people row.

That being said, as more recreational rowers become attracted to the sport, stupid outings with unfortunate outcomes could force changes upon the sport. Consider it abhorrent to row into a situation where you require rescue by anybody NOT in rowing.

Know your swimming limits. Do not row by yourself on a course on the harbor that would put you in a spot that you could not return to safety given equipment failure. All of our boats will float you even if swamped and filled with water, but miles from shore you are hard to see. A storm moving through can create two foot waves (very big for a shell) on the open bay. This is difficult to row or swim through. The shorter wider boats are best suited for really rough conditions.

Hypothermia is not a danger until the winter months as the air/water temperatures drop. I consider a 100 degree rule, that if air temp + water temp is less than 100 degrees, I pay close attention to where and what I'm going to row, staying not only close to shore, but generally closer to home. One of the dangers of cold water is that if you are training hard, sweating and hot, and fall into cold cold water can cause you to pass out.



## Life Jackets

In our sculling lessons, I've purposely avoided discussion of PFDs.

Life jackets are not required on racing shells. There are now PFDs that can be worn that don't impede rowing very much. I do not have that specific info at this time. Here is a note I'm including:

*'Rules regarding personal flotation devices in the United States are found in the Code of Federal Regulations. 33 CFR 175.15 requires one Type I, II, or III PFD for each person on a recreational vessel and an additional Type IV PFD (such as a seat cushion) on recreational vessels 16 feet or over.*

*33 CFR 175.17 (c) contains exemptions.*

*"Racing shells, rowing sculls, racing canoes and racing kayaks are exempted from the requirements for carriage of any type of PFD required under 175.15."*

*The CFR also prevents state laws on PFD's from taking precedence over the Federal regulations; federal law pre-empts them.*

*I am not aware of any oar that has been certified by the Coast Guard as a personal flotation device.*

*Bill Zack*

*Lieutenant Commander, USCG'*

Sometimes a PFD is a prudent tool in a rowing outing. It can also provide a false sense of security in choices of where to row. I believe if you feel you need to take along a PFD to undertake a particular row, it's time to assess whether to row there at all and perhaps a spin on the erg would be more productive and prudent.

That being said, putting a PFD in your boat before taking a long row across the bay is a good idea, as well as a length of rope and a bright red flag (t-shirt for example). If two scullers are a many miles from shore and one oarlock breaks, you can rig a tow line between the two shells and row one in. Similarly a swamped boat could be rescued by a powerboat in the middle of the bay.

The rope should be looped through the riggers and tow boat bow first.



## When Preparing For an Outing

1. Log in and out.
2. Be aware of temps and conditions, 100 degree rule should apply.  
Consider carefully to not scull by yourself if water+air temp < 100.
3. If you are not confident of swimming in open water, or cold water, wear/bring a PFD.
4. Assume that speed boats and jet skis don't see you.
5. Make sure you have proper visibility (lights, etc) and that your boat plugs are in.
6. If you should fall out, you can re-enter from the water or swim boat to shore.



## Water Reentry

1. Right boat, put scull handles together with both blades flat on the water perpendicular to boat, grasp both grips with one hand and push seat to stern stops.



2. With other hand, pull yourself across boat on top of seat, you want to get to a position where you are laying straddled across the boat, or turn sideways so you get your butt on top.



Keep hold of those handles, keep oars ON water.



3. Use your non handle hand to push yourself up enough to twist to get your butt on or near the seat and slide a leg across.



4. Scoot forward so you can get your scull handles in your lap, that frees your hands to lift yourself onto your seat.



If you are unable to get back into your boat, or breakage makes it not helpful to try and row the boat, you can swim your boat by simply pushing it ahead of you while you swim.



Make sure the sculls are free to trail the boat as you push it, and you will have best success swimming the boat from the stern. If tired, you can hang on the stern and kick.



An excellent method of boat recovery if you have breakage and can't row and the swim is too far is to climb up on the stern and paddle the single like a surfboard. The Aeros are easy to paddle like this, the single is more difficult. If you find difficulty staying on the stern deck while you paddle, spread your legs out, or open the stern plug and fill the single with several gallons of water.

