

Maidstone Invicta Rowing Club

Club Safety Policy

1. Safety Philosophy & Our Commitment

Maidstone Invicta Rowing Club (MIRC) has zero tolerance for anyone being harmed because of participation in our sport. We believe that harm is not an inevitable consequence of rowing, and that with the right culture, rules and procedures, incidents can be avoided.

This policy is adopted in line with British Rowing's RowSafe 2026, which recognises that most harmful incidents in rowing arise from at-risk behaviour rather than technical failures. A positive safety culture, where every member takes personal responsibility and looks out for others, is the single most effective safeguard we have.

This document sets out the rules, procedures and expectations that all MIRC members, coaches, coxswains and helpers must always follow. Members are asked to read this policy on joining the club and review it annually thereafter.

2. Positive Safety Culture (RowSafe 1.2)

RowSafe 2026 places a positive safety culture at the heart of all club activity. Safety culture is formed by the beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours of every person in the club and not just the officers and coaches. A club with a positive safety culture has communications founded on mutual trust, a shared sense of the importance of safety, and confidence in the club's precautions.

In practice, every member contributing to that culture will:

- Consider safety before starting or continuing any activity on or off the water.
- Check their boat before going afloat and take care when handling equipment.
- Follow the instructions of their coxswain and coach.
- Dress appropriately for conditions, including restraining long hair to prevent it from interfering with rowing.
- Always abide by the river circulation plan and keep a proper lookout.
- Report every incident they witness, however minor, and reflect on how it could have been avoided.
- Assist, and if necessary, rescue anyone found to be in distress, even during a race.

3. Roles & Responsibilities (RowSafe 1.1)

Everyone involved in rowing must ensure their actions or lack of action do not compromise the safety of themselves or others. The key responsibilities for each role are set out below.

3.1 All Members

- Take responsibility for your own safety, both on and off the water.
- Ensure your actions do not put others at risk, and be willing to raise safety concerns with any club officer.

- Prepare properly for every outing: eat and hydrate appropriately and dress for the prevailing conditions.
- Be aware of and abide by all club safety rules and the river circulation plan.
- Complete your membership form accurately, including any health conditions, medication and swimming ability. Notify the Safety Adviser promptly of any changes to your health that may affect your ability to row safely.
- Bring a full change of clothes, including shoes, to the club before every outing, in case of capsize.
- Report all accidents, capsizes, near-misses and incidents promptly (see Section 17).

3.2 Swimming Requirement

Minimum Standard — All Active Members

All active members must be able to swim 50 metres in light clothing.
Only members who meet this standard are permitted to go afloat from the club.
Swimming ability must be declared accurately on the membership form.

3.3 Club Officers & Committee

- Maintain and publish this Safety Policy and the Club Risk Assessment.
- Appoint and support a Club Rowing Safety Adviser (CRSA) to lead on safety matters at the club.
- Communicate safety rule changes to all members promptly.
- Take appropriate action when members fail to abide by Safety Rules.
- Complete the British Rowing Annual Safety Audit each October and act on its recommendations.
- Maintain up-to-date records of qualified coaches, launch drivers and first aiders.
- Liaise with other water users and stakeholders on the River Medway to avoid conflicting activities.

3.4 Coaches

- Carry a throw line at all times when overseeing an outing.
- Carry a mobile phone at all times to summon help quickly.
- Communicate safety rules to rowers under supervision and lead by example at all times.
- Report all safety concerns to the CRSA and Committee.
- Ensure all launch drivers hold an appropriate RYA qualification or equivalent club-approved training.
- Avoid instructing crews to hold in the catch position; this is unstable and increases the risk of capsize.

3.5 Coxswains & Steerspersons

- Wearing a suitable life jacket or buoyancy aid when afloat is compulsory, not optional. (Coxes only)
- Take responsibility for the crew's safety on the water and be competent to manage emergencies.

- Maintain a good lookout and keep a safe course, always following the river circulation plan.
- Carry a mobile phone where possible.

4. Water Conditions — Traffic Light System

Before every outing, all members must check the Outings Board at the gate to the river. The conditions assessment is made by the Safety Adviser or Director of Rowing (DoR) and takes into account weather, river level, visibility and current strength.

Status	Summertime Rules	Additional Wintertime Rules
GREEN	Safe for general rowing — all crews and scullers may go afloat.	No single sculler may be alone at any time. All single scullers must buddy up and remain within visual contact. Exception: solo sculler accompanied by a bank coach with a throw bag.
AMBER	<p>Experienced crews and scullers only (see Section 5 for full rules).</p> <p>Must be on the approved Amber sculling list to row a single scull or steer a coxless boat.</p> <p>No member with less than two full years' experience without DoR approval.</p> <p>No single scull, double scull, or pair without a buddy boat or bank person with throw bag and phone.</p> <p>Coxed boats: experienced coxswain required. Coxless boats: Amber-listed steersperson only.</p> <p>No crew downstream of the White House or upstream of Archbishop's Palace.</p>	All Summertime Amber rules apply in full.
RED	No rowing under any circumstances.	

If you are in any doubt, do not go afloat.

Red: No rowing under any circumstances.

Amber: Restrictions apply, see Section 5 for the full Amber on-water rules.

If conditions deteriorate during an outing, return to the club promptly.

5. On-Water Rules

The following rules govern who may go afloat and under what conditions. They expand on the traffic light table in Section 4. In any conflict between rules, the more restrictive one always applies.

5.1 Winter Single Sculling (All Members)

Winter is defined as the period when the clocks revert to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Cold water poses a severe and rapid hypothermia risk following capsizing.

Winter Single Sculling Mandatory Rules

No single sculler may be on the water alone at any time during the winter months. The only exception: a single sculler accompanied on the bank by a coach carrying a throw bag. All single scullers must buddy up, remaining within visual contact throughout the entire outing. Every member in a buddy group must be prepared to assist immediately in the event of a capsizing.

5.2 Summer Single Sculling

- All scullers are strongly encouraged to go out with a buddy. Where this is not practical, a novice sculler wishing to go out alone must first satisfy the Safety Adviser, DoR or a club coach of their competence. Written confirmation is required.
- Before going out alone, leave details of the outing, return time and proposed route, with another person who understands their responsibilities.
- All solo outings must be recorded in the Fit Club system and on the Outings Board.

5.3 Junior Scullers & Rowers (Under 18)

Junior Member Rules Strictly Enforced

No member under 18 may go sculling or rowing at any time unless accompanied by a competent adult. All junior scullers must buddy up and remain together if out of sight of a coach or competent adult on the bank. Under Amber conditions, no junior with less than two full years' experience may go afloat without DoR approval; an approved coach must also be present. If a junior rower feels unwell after exercise, a responsible adult must stay with them until they have fully recovered.

6. Clothing, Visibility & Lighting (RowSafe 9.1)

6.1 Clothing

- Dress in layers appropriate to the air and water temperature. In winter, thermal base layers and fleeces are strongly recommended to avoid cotton, which retains moisture and accelerates heat loss.

- Long hair must be restrained (plait, bun or top knot) so that it cannot interfere with rowing.

6.2 Visibility & Lighting

- For members' safety, the club requires single scullers and the bow seat of each crew boat to wear brightly coloured visible clothing when afloat during training. The minimum area for this shall be above the waist, covering a majority of the torso when viewed head-on whilst rowing. Examples of appropriate bright colours include white, yellow, orange, pink, or neon high-visibility fluorescent styles. Members are advised to apply this rule to other seats in a crew boat, particularly the stroke seat or the coxswain in stern coxed boats.
- In line with Environment Agency rules, all rowing boats must display a white light at bow and stern after sunset. LED lights are permitted; flashing lights must not be used as primary lights. Do not fix lights to riggers, as they can be obscured on bends.

7. Boat & Equipment Checks (RowSafe 7.1)

A pre-outing boat check is mandatory before every session. Rowing shells are lightweight precision craft; therefore, minor damage can quickly become a safety hazard on the water.

7.1 Pre-Outing Checks

- Bow ball: must be present, secure and undamaged. Never use a boat with a missing or damaged bow ball.
- Heel restraints: check that shoes and restraints are properly connected. Never use a boat with faulty heel restraints.
- Hull: inspect for holes, cracks or damage. Check that the fin is not bent or missing.
- Hatch covers: ensure all covers are properly fitted before launching, so air compartments remain intact.
- Report any damage to the Boat Master immediately. Do not borrow parts from one boat to repair another.
- If a boat is unfit for use, mark it as such in the Fit Club booking system immediately.

7.2 Handling Boats

- When lifting a boat upside down (e.g. off a rack), hold the saxboard and never the shell itself.
- When lifting a boat the right way up, hold an internal structural part with one hand and support the shell with the other. Never hold the seat, seat rails or other non-structural parts.
- When carrying, watch the riggers and be aware of the bow and stern positions in relation to others.
- Never drop or throw anything into a boat, as even a water bottle can puncture the hull.
- In windy conditions, boats can be blown off trestles, so be sure to secure them before walking away.
- Remove hatch covers after each outing when the boat is put on the rack, so any water can drain.

8. Life Jackets & Buoyancy Aids (RowSafe 7.3)

Life jackets and buoyancy aids are stored at the rear of the River Boathouse. Return all items to the correct location after every use.

- Wearing a suitable life jacket or buoyancy aid when coxing is compulsory per British Rowing RowSafe guidance.
- All members in coaching launches and safety boats must wear a suitable life jacket or buoyancy aid at all times.
- If a suitable life jacket is unavailable, you must not go afloat.
- Failure by a coxswain to wear a suitable life jacket may invalidate British Rowing's and the club's insurance cover.
- Automatic inflating life jackets must not be worn in bow-coxed boats.

9. Capsize Procedures (RowSafe 3.7)

RowSafe 2026 identifies four key cold water hazards: cold shock response; dry drowning; cold incapacitation and swim failure; and circum-rescue collapse. Understanding these risks is essential for every member.

9.1 If You Capsize

The Golden Rules of Capsize

1. STAY WITH THE BOAT. Your boat has built-in buoyancy, so it will not sink if hatch covers are intact.
2. Do NOT swim to the bank without the boat. Do not let go to retrieve lost equipment.
3. Use the boat as a flotation device and swim with it to the nearest accessible bank.
4. In cold water: get as much of your body out of the water as quickly as possible.
5. Do NOT attempt a rescue from another rowing scull as you are likely to capsize too.

For the River Medway:

- Outside the town centre, you can generally stand on the riverbed near the bank
- In the town centre stretch (high walls), make for the town bridge or the steps opposite Fremlin's Shopping Centre, whichever is closer.
- Once ashore, your priority is warmth. The boat is unlikely to come to serious harm and can be retrieved later.
- On the 'Town Straight', there are chains and ladders along the embankment that can be used to assist members who have capsized.

9.2 If You Are Coaching a Capsize

- Rower conscious and able: do not enter the water. Instruct them to stay with the boat, swim to the bank, then help them to exit. Secure the boat to the bank if possible but do not drag it fully out of the water.
- Rower conscious but unable to swim, holding the boat: do not enter the water. Summon assistance via the club launch or another boat.

- Rower unconscious or unable to support themselves: only then should the coach enter the water: climb in carefully, do not jump. If using a launch to rescue, load from the bow and turn the engine OFF before the casualty approaches the propeller.

9.3 Cold Water Immersion & Hypothermia (RowSafe 8.1)

Hypothermia occurs when body temperature falls below 35°C. In cold water, a person's ability to help themselves deteriorates very rapidly. Treat any person immersed in cold water as a potential hypothermia casualty, regardless of how they appear.

Early symptoms: uncontrollable shivering, confusion, slurred speech, loss of coordination. Do not wait for advanced symptoms before acting.

Treatment steps:

1. Move the person indoors or to a warm, sheltered location immediately.
2. Use the Disabled Shower Room (by the gym entrance) use its heaters or give a warm shower if needed.
3. Gently remove wet clothing and dry the person.
4. Apply hypothermia blankets (from the First Aid Box in the Gym). If removing clothes is not possible, apply the blanket over wet clothing.
5. Use gentle body contact if appropriate to aid rewarming.
6. Handle hypothermia casualties gently; rough movement can trigger cardiac arrest.
7. Call 999 if in any doubt or if symptoms are severe.

9.4 If the Person is Unconscious

- Check the airway is clear and place in the recovery position before seeking further help.
- Cover with whatever is available to retain warmth.
- Call 999 immediately.

10. Pre-Outing Checklist

Complete the following before every outing, in order. This checklist reflects RowSafe 2026 sections 3.2 and 9.5:

1. Check the Outings Board at the river gate for the current conditions' status (Green / Amber / Red).
2. Book the outing in the Fit Club system www.fitclub.site
3. If you are the only boat afloat, ensure a person on shore knows your return time and proposed route.
4. Carry out a boat check: bow ball, heel restraints, hull integrity and hatch covers (Section 7.1). Do not go afloat in a damaged boat.
5. Make all seat and rigger adjustments on trestles to avoid overcrowding on the steps.
6. Coxswains: put on a life jacket before going to the steps.
7. **Carry out a personal risk assessment. If in any doubt — do not go afloat.**
8. Check the slope to the steps and apply salt if icy (stored in the boathouse). Note: the third step is deeper than the others.
9. After flooding or high water, the first members to arrive must sweep mud from the steps and stage before anyone launches.

11. Safety Equipment Locations

Equipment	Location
First Aid Box	On the wall of the Gym
Survival / Hypothermia Blankets	In the First Aid Box in the Gym
Throw Lines & Life Buoys	River Boathouse nearest the river. Lines to be found on the left, behind the front doors
Life Jackets & Buoyancy Aids	Back of the Kitchen
Salt (for icy steps)	Base of the trestle hut, on the boating forecourt
Defibrillator	On the wall in the Gym

Return all safety equipment to the correct location immediately after use. Failure to do so puts other members at risk.

12. River Hazards & Navigation

12.1 Upstream of the Club

For approximately 1 kilometre upstream, the river becomes narrow with many bends. Key hazards:

- Moored boats, particularly in the town centre.
- Fishermen on the bank, many of whom use long poles extending across the water.
- Town Bridge: pass through the centre arch only as the side arches can be shallow with submerged obstructions.
- Usual turning points are the upstream wall at Tovil or the landing stage at East Farleigh. Water can flow swiftly near weirs and sluice gates and turn into the stream where possible.
- Cruisers may approach from either direction, particularly in summer, or rarely give warning. Pull into the bank if necessary.

12.2 Downstream of the Club

Most club training takes place downstream. All navigation rules must be followed:

- Moored boats near Fords Wharf and Allington Marina.
- The Malta Inn at Allington Lock can be busy with cruiser traffic. Under Amber conditions, do not proceed downstream of the White House.
- Approach the bend at the Sewage Works carefully from both directions.

12.3 Other Water Users

There is a commercial passenger boat that operates on the Medway: The Kentish Lady. It runs regular services and private charters as far upstream as East Farleigh. In narrower stretches, it

may occupy much of the waterway; coxes, steerspersons and scullers must give way accordingly.

The Maidstone Canoe Club operates from directly opposite the club steps. Canoeists can be unpredictable and may follow the wrong bank; ensure they are aware of your presence. Any collision with a moored or moving vessel must be recorded to British Rowing.

Members must also take care of other water uses, including but not limited to: paddle boarders, individual fishing from the bank, and swimmers.

13. Weil's Disease & Waterborne Infections (RowSafe 8.4)

Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) All Members Must Know This

A serious bacterial infection contracted through contact with water contaminated by rat urine. It is present in UK rivers.

Symptoms appear 2–4 weeks after exposure: high fever, severe headache, muscle aches, jaundice, and in severe cases kidney or liver failure.

After every outing or river contact, wash hands thoroughly before eating or drinking.

Clean and cover any cuts or scratches with a waterproof dressing before and after river contact.

If you develop symptoms within 4 weeks of river contact, seek medical attention immediately and inform your doctor you have been in contact with river water.

Notices are displayed around the club site. All new members are briefed during induction.

14. Health, Wellbeing & Additional Hazards (RowSafe 8)

14.1 Pre-Existing Conditions & Medication

- Members with pre-existing health conditions or chronic illness must declare these on their membership form and discuss with the Safety Adviser before going afloat.
- Members who rely on medication (e.g. for asthma, anaphylaxis, diabetes) must ensure it is accessible at the boathouse during their outing.
- If a rower feels unwell during or after exercise, a responsible adult must stay with them until they are fully recovered.

14.2 Concussion (RowSafe 8.5)

Any member sustaining a head injury or showing signs of concussion, confusion, dizziness, headache, or memory loss must not return to the water on the same day. Follow the British Rowing concussion protocol and seek medical assessment before returning to activity.

14.3 Sunburn & Heat Illness (RowSafe 8.2)

- Apply sunscreen on exposed skin during summer outings, particularly around midday.
- Stay hydrated as dehydration impairs both judgement and physical performance.
- In extreme heat, reduce the intensity and duration of outings and ensure drinking water is available at the boathouse.

14.4 What to Do if Someone Collapses (RowSafe 8.7)

- Call 999 immediately.
- Begin CPR if the person is unresponsive and not breathing normally.
- Use a defibrillator if one is available nearby.
- Do not leave the person alone once help has been called or unless you must fetch a defibrillator.

15. Hazardous Substances (COSHH)

All hazardous substances at the boathouse must be managed in accordance with COSHH regulations.

- Store all hazardous substances in the designated cupboard in the boat master's store, clearly labelled with contents.
- Hazardous substances include: all poisons, paint strippers, thinners, resins, weed killers and flammable liquids.
- Safety data sheets must be readily available for all substances stored at the boathouse.
- Provide personal protective equipment where the risk assessment requires it.
- No hazardous substance may be stored or used in the training hut, club room, kitchen, or any area where food or drink is consumed.
- Any unlabelled substance must be treated as hazardous and must not be consumed.

16. Emergencies & Emergency Contacts

16.1 Calling the Emergency Services

In any emergency requiring outside assistance call 999 immediately.

State: the nature of the emergency, the number of casualties, and the location on the river.

Describe the location by reference to the nearest road access point and direction from it.

Example: '200m from Monktons Lane towards Allington Lock' or '200m from Monktons Lane towards Maidstone'.

16.2 Nearest Accident & Emergency

Maidstone Hospital, Hermitage Lane, Barming, which is accessible via the A26 Tonbridge Road or the A20 London Road.

16.3 Vehicle Access Points to the River

- Lock Lane, Forstal Road, ME14 3AU ~ 500m upstream from the Malta Inn (town side).
- Allington Marina, Castle Road, ME16 0NH.
- Fords Wharf, Buckland Lane, ME16 0BP.
- Monktons Lane, ME14 2PY (town side).
- Opposite the club LA Fitness / Whatman Park entrance, ME16 0SN (public slipway).
- MIRC, James Whatman Way, ME14 1LQ (town side).
- River walk from Archbishop's Palace, Bishops Way, ME15 6YE (town side).
- Tovil Bridge via Wharf Road; Lockmeadow car park, Unicorn's Lane off Fant Lane.

17. Reporting Accidents & Incidents (RowSafe 12)

All accidents, capsizes, near-misses and incidents, including equipment damage, must be reported promptly. Reporting is a requirement of RowSafe 2026 and is essential for the club and British Rowing to learn from what happens and prevent recurrence.

- Report online within 24 hours: www.incidentreporting.britishrowing.org. This automatically notifies the CRSA and the Regional Rowing Safety Adviser.
- Inform the Safety Adviser, Club Captain, or a Committee member in person.

Members are encouraged to report even minor incidents and near misses. These are vital learning opportunities for the whole club.

18. Further Information

This policy is available on the club website. The club completes the British Rowing Annual Safety Audit each October; the Committee reviews outcomes and implements any improvements.

Questions, Concerns or Further Guidance

Contact the Club Rowing Safety Adviser (CRSA) in the first instance.
Safety Officer for MIRC: safety@maidstoneinvicta.co.uk

For wider guidance, contact the Regional Rowing Safety Adviser.
British Rowing safety team: safety@britishrowing.org

Full RowSafe 2026: www.britishrowing.org/about-us/policies-guidance/rowsafe/
Incident Reporting: www.incidentreporting.britishrowing.org
Safety Alert Archive: www.britishrowing.org/knowledge/safety/safety-alert-archive

This document supersedes all previous safety policy documents issued by Maidstone Invicta Rowing Club.

Produced in accordance with British Rowing RowSafe 2026 · www.britishrowing.org/about-us/policies-guidance/rowsafe/