

WJ Crew



# SAFETY MANUAL

Upper Anacostia River  
Bladensburg Waterfront Park

August 2011

This Safety Manual was created to communicate basic safety guidelines for Walter Johnson Crew Club Inc. (“WJ Crew”) and other crews rowing out of Bladensburg Waterfront Park on the Upper Anacostia River. Coaches, parents, athletes, coxswains and boosters are expected to be familiar with these guidelines and to adhere to them, in accordance with U.S. Rowing policy.

## **I. Safety Prerequisites**

### **A. Coaches**

The Head Coach or senior coach present is responsible for team safety on the water, in the boathouse and on the land while handling equipment during practice. The coach should be trained to follow US Rowing safety procedures (Level One Coaching Certificate or equivalent), Red Cross First Aid/CPR and general boating safety, as set forth by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Coaches are responsible for carrying appropriate safety equipment in launches during practice. This includes:

- PFDs for all rowers plus those in safety launch
- paddle
- communication device (cell phone or Walkie-Talkie)
- First Aid kit
- space blanket(s)
- noisemaking device (whistle, airhorn or other)
- 50-foot safety line
- water bailer
- fire extinguisher
- lights (if rowing before sunrise or after dark)
- tools

Coaches should be familiar with traffic patterns on the Upper Anacostia and be able to communicate these procedures to all involved (see map at end).

It is the responsibility of the Head Coach, or senior coach present to make the final decision about continuing or canceling practice due to weather conditions or other emergencies.

### **B. Athletes**

All athletes are responsible for their own safe behavior, both on the water and off. Each individual is responsible for his/her own equipment – oar, coxbox, rigging, foot stretchers, seat and slide. All equipment should be checked before, during and after practice. Any damage needs to be reported to the coach.

Each athlete is familiar with emergency procedures and protocol:

- what to do if they fall out of the boat
- what to do if someone is injured/incapacitated during practice
- what to do when overtaking another boat or being overtaken
- general docking procedures

- which bridge arches to go through heading downstream and upstream
- what to do in high winds, lightning or other weather conditions
- coxswains may carry cell phones, but athletes should not have cell phones on the water
- carry water bottles and wear proper clothing
- inhalers for asthma, epi-pens and other medications are allowed in the boat and should be kept with the athlete, not the coxswain.

In addition, each athlete must complete the necessary documentation before rowing. This includes:

- Registration form with emergency contact information and disclosure of medical information. Medical forms must be complete annually.
- U.S. Rowing liability waiver (completed annually)
- Swim Test voucher. All athletes must pass a swim test of treading water for 5 minutes and swimming 100 yards.
- Safety video check. All athletes must view the US Rowing Safety video.

### **C. Parents/Guardians**

Parents and guardians will review all safety rules and procedures as outlined in this manual and sign waivers for participants under the age of 18. Parents are encouraged to go over safety procedures with their child/children.

During practices at Bladensburg, parents may participate in handling boats and equipment, if approved by the coach as necessary. Parents should not block access to docks, boat bays, trailers or general right-of-way of boats.

Parents should refrain from coaching when Head Coach or senior coach is present, under non-emergency conditions.

All volunteer launch drivers should hold a boating license and be familiar with Upper Anacostia traffic patterns and this safety plan.

## **II. Safety on Land**

At the start of fall and spring rowing seasons, the following must take place before crews go on the water.

- Coaches will review this safety plan with crews.
- Novice athletes will receive specific instruction on the correct handling of equipment, proper clothing required and rowing terminology
- A record of each athlete will be available on-site in a designated area. This should include the athlete's name and date of birth; address; name and phone number of an emergency contact; height, weight, list of allergies and other important medical information; and name of medical insurance provider.
- A back-up emergency kit will be placed in a designated area, including extra space

blankets; signaling device; whistle; paddle; water bailer; 50ft safety line; fire extinguisher; and First Aid kit.

### **III. Safety on the Water**

All rowers are required to adhere to proper procedures while on the water and are to follow the directions of the coaches and coxswains. Shells should not go out unless escorted by a coach's launch.

When on the water, all coaches and additional passengers in safety launches must wear a life jacket.

In the event of an emergency, the coach shall assess the seriousness of the situation and use his/her judgment. In addition to 911, these emergency numbers should be with the coach and posted at the boathouse:

- DC Harbor Patrol: 202-727-4582
- Bladensburg Waterfront Park: 301-779-0371
- Park Ranger: 301-627-7755
- Prince George's Hospital Center :301-618-2000  
3001 Hospital Drive Cheverly, MD 20785-1189
- Gladys Spellman Specialty Hospital and Nursing Center: (301) 618-2010  
2900 Mercy Ln. Cheverly, MD 20785
- Laurel Regional Hospital: 301-725-4300 410-792-2270  
7300 Van Dusen Road Laurel, MD 20707-9266
- Doctors Community Hospital: 301-552-8118  
8118 Good Luck Road Lanham, MD 20706-3596
- Cell phone numbers for other coaches and designated parents

### **III. Safety Rules**

#### **A. River Traffic Patterns and River Hazards (See Map on Page 11)**

General waterway traffic rules have been developed by the U.S.Coast Guard. In general, vessels with the least maneuverability have right-of-way. Motor boats and sailboats under sail must give way to rowing shells. When there is confusion, however, play it safe and take action to avoid collisions. Be courteous on the water and treat others with respect.

All members should familiarize themselves with shallow water, stumps, rocks, buoys, seasonal changes and landmarks.

Steer clear of bridge abutments and other man-made or natural obstacles. Do not negotiate a turn near such obstacles.

The following are directions for rowers, coaches and crews. Notation of river traffic starts at Bladensburg Waterfront Park and works progressively downstream. Please note that the river is not navigable upstream. This information concerns rowing shells and coaches' safety launches.

**Going downstream**

- 1) When launching from the dock, boats should head immediately downstream, sticking to the middle of the river, especially at low tide. At low tide, mud banks opposite the dock and upstream are visible.
- 2) Once clear of the launching area, boats should stay to the right (starboard) going downstream. Be aware of low-lying tree branches and debris. Also, be aware of fishing boats, which may have fishing line that could get caught in your motor.
- 3) **Bridges.** At the New York Avenue Bridge, boats should use the second arch from the starboard bank. Be aware that boats heading upstream will use the same arch, as the water is too shallow to pass under the other arches (at low tide). Boats already underway through the bridges have right-of-way. Be sure to communicate your intention, waiting your turn if necessary.
- 4) At the Railroad/MARC Bridge, use the second arch from the starboard bank. Avoid the sand bar in the middle of the river marked with orange buoys. At high tide this sand bar is not visible. Boats heading upstream will be using the same arch. See above for procedures when another boat is present.
- 5) Do not stop under the bridges.
- 6) Opposite **Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens**. Going downstream, there is an extremely shallow marshy area at a point of land to the starboard (right) side. This is marked with white posts. Stay to the middle of the river.
- 7) Yellow booms stick out on the portside bank, making the river narrow. Two boats can pass with caution at this point. When blocked by the boom, upstream boats give way to boats heading downstream.
- 8) As the river turns at the big bend, swing out to the far right, aiming for the far (starboard) shore. Head toward the retaining wall and continue to curve around as the river turns. In general, the water is deeper near the retaining walls.
- 9) **National Arboretum.** A small dock is visible on the starboard bank as you go downstream. A factory is visible on the port side. As the river widens out, be aware that the wind may pick up as you head down the Anacostia. Keep to your starboard side heading downstream.
- 10) At low tide, the bank with the factory is wide and shallow up- stream from the factory. Crews traveling up river should stay to the middle of the river.
- 11) **RFK Stadium.**

- 12) **Railroad Bridge.** Only one narrow arch is open for boats passing upstream and downstream. As you row downstream, swing wide to the starboard to see the opening. Check for traffic coming from the other direction. This arch may be blocked by debris after heavy rainstorms and is impassable during extremely high tides. Exercise extreme caution.

### **Cold Weather/Winter Rowing**

Rowing when the water temperature falls below 50° should be done with great consideration. Hypothermia is a swift and incapacitating killer that strikes when the combination of cold weather and moisture work to decrease body temperature. It can take mere minutes before a full-sized adult is incapable of helping himself once hypothermia has set in. Keep in mind that you don't have to fall in the water to get hypothermia! Cold air temperatures and any moisture on the body (from being splashed, rain, sleet, snow) can lead to hypothermia (see Weather-Related Health Emergencies).

However, 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. 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 Weather-Related Health Emergencies for information on Hypothermia and other weather related emergencies.

## **IV. Inclement Weather**

Coaches 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. Crews should not launch if such conditions exist or are seriously threatening. Coaches and scullers should listen closely to NOAA weather channels routinely.

**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. This is especially true in wide parts of the river.

**Heavy Rains & Fast Currents** - After heavy periods of rain, currents can increase in speed and strength quickly. The river usually will rise over a period of days after it stops raining and will recede in about the same amount of time after the peak. At these times extreme caution should be taken. It is strongly advised that novice crews be kept above the Route 50 bridge during these times. In all cases the currents can be quite swift and unpredictable. Special attention should be paid to all bridge arches, as currents are accelerated as the water passes through. Last, with heavy rains and currents on the Anacostia, come heavy debris in the form of plastic water bottles, logs, tires and other trash.

**Lightning Storms** - Very dangerous. Crews should return immediately to the dock, or proceed immediately to shore if the boathouse is too distant. If past the large bend in the river (up-river from the arboretum) crews can dock there and wait out the storm. If by RFK stadium,

crews can head towards the Anacostia Community Boathouse downstream from the railroad bridge. There does not have to be rain or thunder to have lightning. If the sky begins to look bad, it probably is. If you hear thunder you must get off the water as quickly as possible. Do not return to the water unless you do not hear thunder for 15min.

**Fog** - Obviously limits visibility, but also mutes sounds. If caught in fog it is recommended that crews proceed with extreme caution and appropriately slower speeds in the direction of the boat house. 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. Fog is often times thicker upstream. Do not assume that fog that appears to be thinning will continue to do so!

## **WEATHER-RELATED HEALTH EMERGENCIES**

(The following is Appendix A of *the Safety Rules & Guidelines for the Potomac River* and is reproduced with permission from the Potomac River Safety Committee.)

### **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 of 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, loss of strength and coordination, semiconsciousness.

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: 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. Call for emergency help immediately.

## **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.

#### *Early Heat Exhaustion*

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

Action: Rest and fluid replacement.

#### *Advanced Heat Exhaustion*

Advanced Symptoms: Profuse sweating, muscle in-coordination, impaired judgment, 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 re-hydration is a priority.

#### *Heat Stroke*

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

Action: Get medical help immediately! Lower body temperature by immersing in water, maintaining horizontal position of victim. Stop treatment when victim is conscious.

### **CAPSIZE PROCEDURES AND PERSON OVERBOARD**

(The following is Appendix B of *the Safety Rules & Guidelines for the Potomac River* and is reproduced with permission from the Potomac River Safety Committee.)

**NOTE:** It is the responsibility of any coach boat to provide assistance to any capsized boat even if from another team, 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. Be aware of your prop! All crew members 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 stern ports before going on the water). 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 crew member 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 a head count 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 crew members 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. This can include draping oneself over the top of the hull. A minimum of movement is key to retaining body heat. Constantly check on crew mates and keep up one-on-one communication.

#### **To recap procedures:**

1. Stay calm.
2. Stay with the shell.



3. Take a head count.
4. Pair up and keep communicating with each other.
5. Attract attention of launches, crews, or people on shore.
6. If need be, roll shell over and drape the body across the hull. (Sinking shell or cold conditions)
7. Wait for help.

There is one other event that should be addressed that is similar to what was mentioned above: man overboard. A violent crab by an oarsmen can throw them out of the boat. In this situation, it is up to the ejected rower to stay below the surface of the water till the shell has passed (this avoids getting hit in the head by a fast moving rigger(s)). The crew should stop rowing and hold water immediately so they can lend assistance. The crew should get the attention of the coach's launch while the rower treads water. In the event that a launch is not nearby the crew can back up to the rower in question so the rower can use the shell as a floatation device. It is also feasible to pass an oar to the ejected rower, using the oar as a floatation device. Once removed from the water, the rower should be evaluated to determine if the rower is fit to continue or if a medical emergency is present.

(The preceding Safety Rules are a chapter from *the Safety Rules & Guidelines for the Potomac River* and is reproduced with permission from the Potomac River Safety Committee.)

# Upper Anacostia River Map

