

NELSON ROWING CLUB

Rescue and Recovery Notes

Introduction

The purpose of these notes is to give our adult members some idea of what to do in the case of on-water emergencies that may happen when you are out on the lake in Singles with only one or two companions and no other boats of any sort close enough to render assistance to you.

This situation probably covers at least 75% of all our adult activity, and this is not likely to change in the future.

There is no way to consider all possible eventualities, so you must be prepared to deal with whatever sequence of events occurs and to minimize the harm that arises from them.

Preparation

Always be mentally prepared for on-water accidents;

- * Have a rowing plan and only change it after all in your group know what the changes are.
- * Maintain visual contact at all times with your group.
- * Always know which shore is closest and stay reasonably close to it.
- * Know where there are beaches and other landing points.
- * Wait for the slower members of your group, or row back towards them periodically if they are much slower than you are.
- * Before leaving the boat house and dock, check that the coach boat equipment is in its place and that there is gas in the gas tank.
- * Make sure that your feet are **NOT** strapped tightly into the shoes.
- * Always carry a boat house key; if the person in the water is the only one with a key, you may not be able to get back in to call for help or get the coach boat.
- * Recognize that no matter how experienced or careful you are, you are not immune to equipment failure or plain bad luck.
- * Carry a cell phone and a whistle. Dial 911 in the case of an emergency.

RESCUE

The most likely accident is a Single capsizing, leaving its occupant in the water with the boat upside down, and with either one or both oars still in the oar locks; the companion boats should be somewhere within a 0.5 km radius. If they are not in front of the capsized boat, it may be some minutes before they even know there is a problem. The capsized rower will be initially shocked, cold and confused, so immediately get hold of the boat and drape yourself over it and take stock of your situation. No two such events will be the same so one cannot provide a list of exactly what you should do, but the following are general guidelines.

For the capsized rower

- * Attract attention to yourself by blowing a whistle or shouting if anyone is close enough to hear.
- * Get as much of your body out of the water on top of the boat as possible.
- * Conserve your strength; unless you are very close to shore, you are unlikely to be able to propel the boat any distance in a helpful direction just by kicking or paddling with your feet and hands.

It is possible to get back into an overturned Single but difficult in all cases, particularly for boats rigged with fore and aft stays (Kysa and Carbo). To do so, the boat has to be upright, both oars have to be in the oarlocks and with the handles close enough to be grasped with one hand. If you can meet these conditions and no help is at hand or likely to come soon, you could try, but do not exhaust yourself with repeated failed attempts.

Your principal source of rescue is your companions, who immediately on recognizing your plight, should row to you and start the rescue process. What this depends on where the capsizing took place, what the conditions are and how many and what sort of boats you have available. Again, some general guidelines.

For the other rowers

- * Concentrate on getting the person to shore; forget about equipment, possessions etc. until the person is safe from drowning.
- * If you are close to shore, tow the person to shore, but only if they are capable of being towed.

- *If a Double is present, use it for the tow vessel.
- *If more than one other boat is present, send one for help to either nearby occupied houses along the shore line, power boats in the vicinity or back to the dock to get the coach boat and/or to phone for help.
- *Keep the most experienced rower on the capsize scene.
- *Try to get the capsized person to shore if at all possible, but remember that to do so by towing, they will be leaving their only floatation behind them, and from that point forward, they will be relying on the strength in their hands and arms to hold onto the tow boat. This decision will depend on all conditions relevant at the time.
- *If you can get both the person and the boat to shore, and they are capable of rowing, get them to row back to the dock.
- *Do not risk capsizing yourself; this can turn an accident into a disaster.
- *If you are the only boat present, what you do must depend on the circumstances. You may have to leave the capsized person alone and go and get help if there is no other safe way of getting them to shore.

Using a Single as a rescue boat

This can be done if the person in the water can follow instructions and has the ability to hold onto the rescue Single. The general way of doing this is as follows.

- *Approach the capsized boat from the windward side (so that the wind will not blow the capsized boat into your boat) and back in to the person in the water so that they can reach and hold on to your stern.
- *Keep your oars clear of any part of their boat or oars.
- *Get them to hold onto the stern symmetrically so that they will not capsize you.
- *Row gently away from the capsized boat and head for the nearest shore. Rowing too hard will jerk the stern from their grasp; "arms only" will be all that they can stand, particularly if their hands are numb.
- *On approaching the shore, turn around and back in if it is rocky. Do not leave until you see that they are totally on dry land.

Do not try and recover their boat with yours since you cannot tow it effectively. You cannot hold on to it and row at the same time. Go and get the coach boat or whatever is the closest help at hand to get the capsized person back to a warm, dry condition. Only then worry about equipment recovery.

Communications

Some rowers carry their cell phone with them, which, assuming they are not the person in the water gives them the opportunity of calling 911 for help immediately. This is certainly worth doing if the situation is dire, but it will not necessarily result in an immediate and effective response since there will not be a rescue boat standing by waiting for such a call. So for at least the first hour, even if a call for help is made and received, you will be dependent on your own efforts.

If you carry a cell phone, you should also carry the emergency numbers and those of club members who are likely to be able to respond on short notice to provide help.

If you call 911, be sure to tell the responder that it is an "on-water rescue" and that a boat will be necessary. Tell them clearly where on the lake the person is using landmarks that everyone is familiar with. Without this information, the responding rescue crew may be in a vehicle driving up and down the shore roads without being able to render any assistance.

RECOVERY

The following assumes that you will come back to the dock to get the coach boat after the person in the water has been rescued and looked after. This being the case, you should have time to do things in a methodical manner. If other power boats are involved in the rescue, try and get them to tow the capsized boat back to the dock.

1. Open the boat house, make any calls necessary if you have a cell phone and bring down all coach boat equipment* to the dock. Try to get at least one other person to help you in the boat. Lock the boat house door.
2. Choose the most appropriate coach boat for the recovery at hand (small boat for near dock recoveries under calm conditions, large boat for everything else).
3. Load all equipment into the boat chosen, connect gas tank to motor and start it**. Only then unlock the bow chain lock leaving the chain, lock and key on the dock.

4. Cast off the stern rope and proceed to the capsized boat. Remember that it will move downstream at about 1 kph and the wind may blow it anywhere.
5. On reaching the capsized boat, first remove both oars from the oar locks (or recover any oar that has separated from the boat) and close the oarlock keepers.
6. Right the capsized boat and have the other person in the coach boat hold the bow or stern of it out of the water so that the rigging is well clear of the surface and the opposite end is the only point of contact with the water. To try and tow it on a rope is slow and difficult since it will flop over to one side, the rigging will dig in and you will have to slow down or stop.
7. Go back to the dock and land the recovered boat on stretchers on the dock. Drain as much water out of it as you can before taking it back to the boat house. There may well be water in the watertight compartments and the rigging (in the case of Lorne Loomer).
8. The oars may also have water in them. Store them "handles down" in the boat house to let this water drain out.
9. Lock up coach boat and return all equipment to the boat house.

* Equipment:

Coach boat key

Two coach boat oars

Gas tank (at least $\frac{1}{4}$ full)

Life jackets

Tool kit

Two stretchers (to receive recovered boat)

**Motor starting

- a. Connect gas line and pump 3 or 4 times; release vent screw on tank filler cap.
- b. Insert plastic tongue (attached to gas tank) under "kill" button on motor.
- c. Place throttle setting in start position.
- d. Pull out choke control on motor to the fully out position.
- e. Pull starter cord vigorously for a few (or many?) times until the motor starts, then push in the choke control as the motor warms up. Move throttle setting to run position. Note that the small boat motor is easier to start than the large one.