



O U R C

Emergencies on the water

Emergency stops

If the coxswain calls "Hold it up!" or "Hold it hard!" the crew should:

- put their blades flat on the water;
- applying upward pressure to the handle so the still feathered blade goes under the water; and
- then rotate them increasingly as the boat slows down so that they square up.
- Once the boat has lost most of its speed it is possible to back down to bring the boat to a halt.

If the boat capsizes or sinks

It is vital that you understand that most deaths following immersion occur in the first few minutes. Core hypothermia is a real danger from immersion in cold water, but it has been focused to the exclusion of the other dangers. The effects of the cold on your extremities take hold very quickly, making it hard to grip, and draining your ability to swim. Thus the choices you make early on are the most important.

As you realise you will go in, mentally prepare yourself for it. As you hit cold water you may suffer Cold Shock Response. This causes your breathing and heart rates to rise rapidly, which can in turn cause dizziness, confusion and panic. You need to recognise the effects when they happen and be reassured that they will pass after a minute or so.

Try to take a deep breath, pinch your nose to close your nostrils and shut your mouth as you go in, keeping your face out of the water. There is a chance that the cold water hitting the back of your throat can cause your airway to close. For the same reason, when you are in the water, keep your face out of the water, turn your back to the waves, and try to time your inhalations with the troughs between waves.

If you are in a crew boat, check that everyone in the crew is accounted for.

Once in the water the two priorities are (i) to retain buoyancy, generally by staying with your boat, and (ii) to retain body temperature, generally by getting your body out of the water. You have various options:

1. THE FIRST THING TO DO IS TO CLIMB UP OUT OF THE WATER AND LIE ON YOUR UP-TURNED HULL. Do this straight away without even thinking of anything else.

Then you can consider what to do next according to the circumstances you find yourself in. If, for whatever reason, this is NOT possible, then you still have options, which are detailed below.

2. If you are CERTAIN that you can do it, and do it quickly, right your boat and get back in. The boat can be righted by reaching across the up-turned hull, grabbing the far rigger,

then leaning back while standing on the near rigger. Be careful of the far blade as the boat rolls over.

Then there are two methods of getting back in. One method is to hold the ends of the handles together with the hand nearest the stern, then lift yourself back into the scull by using your other arm and kicking with your legs. Alternatively, you can hold the ends of the handles together with the hand nearest the stern, but then swim towards the bow, keeping hold of the handles, allowing the buttons to come away from the swivels. From there you can slide up on your stomach onto the canvas and swing one leg over the bow. Keeping low, gradually inch along the canvas towards the seat. Once you are over the breakwater, and sitting on the decking, you can sit up and get your feet into the boat. Then you can row back to the Boathouse, or to the bank to get warm and dry again.

NB: It should be stressed that you have to be confident that you are physically capable of attempting this action, and know how to do it. It requires you to get back in the water, which is not ideal. Moreover, the effort required to right the boat and get back in could exhaust you and will certainly reduce your body temperature more quickly, so if you try and fail you will be in a worse position. If you do attempt it, and fail at the first attempt, do not try a second attempt, but simply get back out of the water and either await rescue or paddle the boat to the shore using your hands.

3. If you are not confident you will succeed in righting your boat and getting back in, and/or rescue is easily and promptly at hand:

a) Get out of the water by climbing up and lying on your up-turned hull, or the stern canvas of someone else's boat.

b) If (a) is not possible, hold onto your boat with your back to the waves and keep still in the water. Treading water or swimming increases the rate of heat loss by up to 40%. You cannot keep yourself warm by moving when in the water. If you can, cross your arms across your chest, keeping your elbows tucked into your sides, and then bring your knees up to your chest to form the foetal position. If there is a group of you in the water, huddle together keeping those most at risk - those who are thin, less fit, wearing less clothing - in the middle of the group.

c) If (b) is not possible - if your boat has sunk or been broken up -, tread water with your back to the waves.

Once you have made your choice, make sure the rescuer is aware of the problem. Shout to attract attention.

4. If you are not confident you will succeed in getting back in the boat, and rescue is NOT imminent or you are drifting towards a hazard:

a) Climb up onto your boat with it still up-turned, straddle it and paddle it back to the shore with your arms. Note you do not need to right the boat before getting on and paddling to the shore. The riggers and blades will not induce excessive resistance, indeed will actually help to balance the boat.

b) If (a) is not possible, swim to the nearest end of the boat, hold onto it and swim with it to the bank. Swim straight towards the bank, letting the stream take you along with it, unless dangerous to do so. (Advice used to be to swim into the stream slightly so that you hit the bank level with the point at which you went into the water, however this keeps you in the water for longer, so do not do it.)

NB: It should be stressed that (a) and (b) are not alternatives. By following (b) you are staying in the water and, since the ends of the boat are not very buoyant, you will not have support if you get into trouble. Only attempt (b) if you cannot, for whatever reason, get onto your boat.

c) If (b) is not possible, swim to the shore. Bear in mind that this should be your very last option.

Once you are on dry land, get warm and dry. Get inside as soon as possible, where you should change into dry clothes.