

SKIFF SAFETY

The most important rule, in my opinion, is to AVOID any accident or incident by being aware of your crews' capabilities and that of your vessel in the prevailing operating conditions, and to row (or not) accordingly. The weakest/least experienced crew member should be your yardstick. A quick and simple risk assessment can be undertaken and discussed by all.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER:

1. Tide direction-close in the bay at its weakest- becomes stronger the further out you go. Is it neaps or springs?
2. Wind -strength and direction- what is forecast? Is it due to increase or change direction during the course of row?
3. Sea state -breaking seas are potentially more of a risk to a small vessel. (And breaking seas on the beach a risk to the skiff!)

Quite often the conditions within the bay can be good, yet when further out it is not, therefore perhaps limit your row to close inshore. Remember, new/least experienced members may feel nervous of windy conditions but be reluctant to say so, and would be comforted by a pre row brief and the sensible guidance of experienced members. If it is rough further out, a change in wind direction can quickly alter conditions in the bay, so keep an eye on the weather at all times and if in doubt return to shore.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

1. Lifejackets - neatly hung up on hangers from last outing. Having had a post row check by the previous user. Always check prior to rowing to ensure the green tell-tale clip is in place over trigger cord. Ensure jacket fitted correctly (snug fit) and that manual pull cord is visible. **Everyone must be aware that these are manually operated lifejackets, and to activate, the cord has to be pulled down firmly.** They are only buoyant when fully inflated. Any lifejacket which appears to be faulty put to one side and mark as such to allow a competent nominated person/s to check and rectify fault.

2. Grab Bag - this bag (or it may be a container) kept under the coxswains seat, contains a waterproof VHF radio, hand flares and a First Aid kit. Basic operating instruction will be given shortly for radio and flares. At least one person in crew should be familiar with use of this safety kit.

Radio guidelines to be written when devised.

3. *(We also need to check radio battery is charged and radio working - a radio call check to Aberdeen Coastguard should be made periodically to ensure it is actually transmitting (suggest weekly but at least every month) -this has added benefit of giving people practice at using the radio, and making the CG watch staff familiar with skiff activity -no bad thing. (Protocols to follow). Also ensure warps, anchor and bailer on board.*

*Normally, the Cox would be responsible for the safe operation of boat, but quite often to date, this happens to be the least experienced!
Perhaps in the interim, an experienced member can do these checks -which should only take a couple of minutes, and once a routine is established become second nature before going out.*

A quick eyeball over boat to ensure nothing broken, loose or damaged .Ropes stowed neatly and remember the bung!

BOAT HANDLING

SHORE DUITES.

When possible a person on the shore should be allocated to watch the boat whilst it is being rowed. The person watching should be aware that in the event of an observed emergency (capsize/man over board/driftng) that a 999/112 telephone call has to be made asking for Aberdeen Coastguard and stating the nature of the emergency, geographical position and number of people involved (i.e. capsized skiff with 5 people in water). **DO NOT DELAY** – if the situation resolves itself then everything can be stood down, if you procrastinate, time will only make the whole thing worse. The person watching the boat should keep an eye on the boat the whole time.

ON BOARD.

1. Having followed the launch protocol the skiff is afloat and you are ready for the rowing session. Make the final checks that all the skiffs safety equipment is present and each crew member has checked and is wearing their life jackets correctly. Take a bottle of drinking water with you and a mobile phone in a waterproof cover.
2. Try to enter the skiff in order (i.e. cox first then stroke etc.) Walk to your seat down the centre of the skiff and **NOT** directly on the planking.
3. Make a plan of where you are going to row and stick to it.
4. Make sure you are aware of weather conditions and the run of the tide during your row. Is there going to be enough water on your return to recover the skiff easily. Rowing downwind or with the tide at the start of a session will mean rowing against it to get back, making it hard work for tired rowers. Keep an eye on the weather at all times and if changes occur return.

5. Make sure you are aware that not all rowers are of the same ability. Plan your session to take this in to account. A crew is only as strong as its weakest member.

A small rowing boat is very susceptible to people movement so move about carefully.

6. When afloat only change seats when necessary and should this occur only one person to move at a time.
7. In the case of man overboard refer to man over board guidelines. Do not all lean to the same side as high risk of capsize. Person in the water should be assisted carefully with remaining crew counter balancing on opposite side. Oars can be used to assist in recovery.
8. IN THE EVENT OF CAPSIZE. Stay calm; pull cord to inflate lifejacket and STAY WITH THE BOAT. Immediately check that all crew are accounted for. The Skiff will float but with neutral buoyancy, i.e. probably not enough to support all crew climbing on board but possibly sufficient for you to hang onto in the water. Only leave the boat if you are very close to shore and you KNOW you can swim to it – STAY TOGETHER. Radio to be used to call for help. Use hand flares as a visual aid.

COXING.

9. When coxing make slow, measured movements on the rudder. Attempting to perform a “hand break turn” by steering sharply will make rowing very difficult and could damage the rudder.
10. The cox is responsible for the course the skiff takes. Stay well clear of the shoreline and be aware of submerged dangers. During their breeding season (June to July) keep a good distance from the tern rafts so they are not disturbed.

SKIFF RECOVERY

11. Once returned safely to shore the rudder should be removed and laid in the skiff. To recover the skiff ease the skiff in to the water

with the bow rope held firmly on the shore. Locate the skiff in to the guides and slide the trolley under the skiff. Secure the bow rope to the trolley handle and pull clear of the water. Remove the bung.

12. Having returned the skiff to the shed hose down inside and out with freshwater. Bail and sponge the remaining water out of the boat before storing inside. Stow safety equipment in the appropriate places.
13. Report any incidents that may have occurred either to the Safety Officer or a member of the committee.