

# **Greater Houston Rowing Club Handbook**

3/12/2024

Safety Rules and Club Procedures  
[www.greaterhoustonrowingclub.com](http://www.greaterhoustonrowingclub.com)

GHRC members are required to read this document, to agree to abide by the rules and procedures described herein, and to enjoy their time on the water.

# Greater Houston Rowing Club Handbook Safety Rules and Club Procedures

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### Pre-requisites

All rowers must have the following documents completed, current, and on file before entering boats on the water:

- Signed US Rowing Liability Waiver either paper or online updated annually.
- Medical Emergency Contact Form completed and/or updated with current information.

All rowers must be able to swim.

All rowers must have read and understood this document. This document will be housed on the GHRC website.

Non-novice rowers joining GHRC must receive a thorough briefing by a designated club member to ensure familiarity with the river and its hazards prior to rowing on the water. Prior to using club equipment, such members must also be checked for competency by a designated club member.

## **Safety is #1**

For you, for others, for equipment: Use caution and common sense each time you row as water and weather conditions change on the creek.

All rowers are responsible for the safety of themselves and others. In coxed boats, the cox is in charge when making decisions that may affect the safety of the boat or multiple members of the crew.

Single scullers are responsible for their own safety. If you are not confident in your swimming ability, the club recommends that you carry personal flotation on board and do not row alone.

### Be aware and be prepared

1. Sign out your boat. If you are the bow or cox of a multi-person boat, sign out and back in the boat. List the names of all people in the boat
2. Be aware what is going on around you on land and water.
3. Use common sense, watch for and anticipate problems.
4. Learn the dock and boathouse layout.
5. Do not wear ear-plugs that will prevent you from hearing warnings or instructions.
6. Have a dry set of weather-appropriate clothing in your car.
7. A fully stocked first aid kit is on the wall inside the boathouse

## Know the course

1. Know the traffic pattern, bridges [Appendix], island and hazards at different water levels.
2. Do not take club boats above the US90A bridge on the Upper Course, or on the American Canal off the Lower Course.
3. Keep to the right (starboard oars to shore) – be particularly careful to stay to your side when taking corners: no “rowing the tangents”.
4. Boats going downstream have the right of way under the Williams Trace bridge
5. Boats on the straight-through part of a “T” intersection have the right of way.
6. Larger boats are less maneuverable and have right of way – with an exception, as noted below, at the Williams Trace bridge.

## On the water

1. Watch the weather. Boats will not enter the water or will head in immediately in the event of any threat of electrical storm (see Lightning Safety) or extremely high wind.
2. Bring enough water, hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Layer clothing for weather.
3. We recommend bringing a cell phone in a waterproof bag for emergency, especially if alone.
4. Know 911 information and where you are on the creek in relation to shore landmarks.
5. Do not row at night. Only experienced rowers should be out at early dawn or late dusk. Navigation Lights that fit on the Bow Number Holders are to be used. They are on the keyboard.
6. In a single or coxing from the bow seat, look behind you every 4-5 strokes.
7. If you go into the water, stay with the boat and signal other rowers for help (a whistle or oars in the air), if needed. You may be able to swim it to shore. Listen for cox instructions. Take your time and avoid exhaustion. Watch for hypothermia.

The following will ensure a more enjoyable experience for everyone on the river:

1. Advise other rowers of boats and potential problems ahead.
2. Be alert for rowers heading toward you.
3. Be alert for novice rowers or rowers needing help.
4. Please be cognizant of noise levels on the creek (no unnecessary yelling, profanity, or music devices)

## Lightning Safety

Do not row if the weather forecast calls for thunderstorms. Please use Lightning Detector meter in boathouse if unsure.

At the first sound of thunder, you must return to the docks. If you are caught on the water during a thunderstorm, immediately row to shore, beach the boat, and seek shelter. There is no safe place outside during a thunderstorm, but if you are unable to get to shelter, try these suggestions to minimize your risk:

- Squat low to the ground. Do the "lightning position" by kneeling or crouching with your hands on your knees—never lie flat on the ground.
- Avoid tall structures (towers, trees, fences, poles) and open areas.
- Get away from water, including pools, rivers, lakes, and beaches. If on the water, come ashore and land any boats, kayaks, canoes, or other watercrafts.
- Move into valleys, ravines, or low areas.
- Avoid water and wet items, metal objects, tents, and natural lightning rods (golf clubs, tractors, fishing rods, bicycles).
- In the woods, stay under a low clump of trees. Never stand under a tall single tree in an open area.
- If you feel your hair stand on end, drop to your knees, bend forward, and put your hands on your knees.

### On the dock

- Watch for other boats and equipment.
- Boats docking have priority over boats launching.
- Have equipment ready so you can push off the dock quickly.
- All boats must have a bow ball. Check oarlock gates, hatch covers and bow and stern plugs before leaving dock.
- Always approach a dock slower than you think you need to. Consider the wind.
- When launching a boat, go as far down the dock as possible so that others can more easily launch behind you.
- When returning to the dock, land as close as possible to the shoreward end of the dock so that others can more easily launch or return to the dock. Or move down the dock to allow other boats to dock behind you.
- Clear the dock of boat, oars, equipment, water bottles, etc. as soon as possible.
- Wait until all of your equipment and personnel are off the dock and racked before having any discussions unrelated to clearing the dock.
- Do not congregate in the boat bays if other boats are waiting to be racked.
- In multi-person boats, everyone is expected to help when taking the boat to the dock and carrying it back to the boathouse.

## Sculling and Sweep Boat Safety

### On land

Before getting into boats, all Beginning Rowing Classes will undergo instruction on moving shells while on land:

- carrying boats from the boathouse to the water

- setting boats in the water
- carrying boats back and carefully racking them.

This will help to ensure safe methods of carrying and preventing damage to the equipment. It also reinforces the club's commitment to safety protocol. The club Athletic Director will periodically review safe boat carrying with rowers, especially if rowers become lax.

The cox is responsible for the boat on land and on water. Obey commands promptly.

### On the water

- Club boats may be on the water only during daylight hours, and during dusk and dawn.
- Boats will follow the posted traffic pattern (starboard blades closest to shore). Coxswains and bow seat in coxless boats will watch vigilantly for oncoming or crossing boat traffic and other obstructions.
- Members will sign boats out and back in (for every outing) with the club electronic logbook, as required by US Rowing Safety Protocol. This is a requirement for personal and club owned boats.

### Safety requirements for all rowers

- Successfully complete a Learn to Row clinic and/or be checked out by a designated club sculling member before being allowed access to club equipment.
- Be sure to notice which, if any, other boats are already out and on the water.
- Check equipment for breakage or wear before going out. Tag defective equipment, log it in the electronic logbook, and notify the Board member. Never row equipment which has been tagged for repair.
- Unless accompanied by a launch, boaters are responsible for their own safety. The club encourages rowing with a buddy.
- Learn and conform to traffic patterns. Be alert and always be aware of where you are heading.
- Wash and dry club boats upon returning to the boathouse by sponging off and spraying with the hose. Check for and note any needed repairs in the log. Tag the boat for repair indicating it should not be rowed.
- When signing back in on the electronic logbook, note any new hazards for other rowers.

Scullers under the age of 18 may use club equipment only under the supervision of an adult member and with permission of a parent.

## **In the Event of Emergency**

- In class and clinic situations, the coach is in charge. All coxswains and rowers must follow the directions of the coach.
- If there is a health or safety emergency on the water:
  - Call 9-1-1 using a cell phone. There are “EMERGENCY” signs next to each door with the boathouse address and 911 reporting information. There is an emergency call box on the outside of the front door. The nearest land line is at Fluor Daniel. Be sure to note your water or dock location to responders (example: Upper Creek, Lower Creek, Brooks Lake, proximity to bridge or landmark).
  - Contact the injured person’s designated emergency contact and/or parent. The Emergency Contact numbers are posted in the boathouse.
  - Contact a club Board Member within 2 hours.
- All medical or first aid emergencies during club activities will be reported to GHRC Board Member within 2 hours.
- First Aid and Emergency equipment in the boathouse includes:
  - Two First Aid kits mounted on the inside wall at the front of the boathouse: one kit contains supplies for minor injuries (cuts, scrapes, etc.); the second kit contains supplies for more extensive first aid (fractures, stitches, etc.)
  - Two wall-mounted Fire Extinguishers (powder), next to the entrance doors, front and back. Operation is described on the extinguishers: remove the safety pin; aim the nozzle at the base of the fire; press the lever.
- All serious incidents (boat collision, near miss or medical first aid) will be documented on the GHRC Incident Report and provided to a club board member within 48 hours. See the Emergency signs for names and phone numbers.

## **Equipment Maintenance**

Properly functioning, well maintained equipment is essential to the safety of rowers.

- As a club member, you have access to all club boats. Ask a board member or more experienced members about the ability to row the various boats. Some are less stable than others and require very good technique to row well. Rigging, hull shape, etc. will suggest suitability for you rowing the various boats.
- If equipment is broken, do not use it. If it breaks, stop rowing. Rowing with broken equipment will further damage the equipment. Rowers are responsible as they enter the boat to check bolts, rigging, top nuts, foot stretchers etc. for tightness and proper functioning. They are encouraged to check periodically during the workout that everything is in working order.
- Each Coach or instructor is responsible for any breakage that occurs under his/her instruction. They must either fix the breakage or document the repairs needed with the equipment manager.
- Rigging – You may adjust the tracks, foot stretchers, and oarlock spacers only. Do not change the riggers on club shells without permission from Athletic

Director. Oars: Do not change the rigging of club oars without permission from Athletic Director.

- Cleanliness - Boats and oars are to be rinsed off with a hose. Boat hulls, riggers, oarlocks, and tracks should be sponged clean of creek scum and dirt periodically. Wipe entire boat with clean dry rag. Oar collars should be sponged clean of dirt after each row.
- If inside of boats get any water during row, open hatches to drain any water that may have gotten into the boat and leave hatches open to dry when boats are placed on the racks.
- Boats, oars, and oar handles are to be washed periodically with a soapy solution. NOTE: NEVER clean boat hulls with anything stronger than soapy water – dishwashing detergent ONLY. Anything stronger will harm the composite surfaces of the boat.
- Thoroughly clean and bandage all cuts and blisters before touching equipment.
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling wet boats.

## **Club Rules and Procedures**

- If a member of the club hires a non-member for private coaching the following steps must be taken:
  - The non-member coach must sign a waiver.
  - The non-member coach must be trained on the waterway.
  - Coaching session should only take place on the waterway to the 90 bridge.
  - \$20 per session for use of single or \$40 per hour for use of launch.
  - If using the launch, must have at least 3 persons to transport the launch and equipment.
  - The member and coach must be trained on the use of the launch.
  - The member and the coach will be responsible for any damage to the boats.
  - Boat and launch must be cleaned prior to storage
- Boathouse Keys – A boathouse key can be requested by a member who is at least 18 years old and approved by the Board of Directors. The rower must demonstrate an appropriate skill level, an understanding of the safety program, care of the boats and equipment, and be a member in good standing for at least 3 months. The requesting member must be checked out by a board member and sign the appropriate forms. The initial key is free, however, any replacement key \$10.00. Members may not copy or lend the key to others. If the key privilege is abused, the Board of Directors may terminate key authority.
- Personal Items – Do not leave personal items around the boathouse. Periodically, loose items will be gathered in the Lost & Found basket at the front of the boathouse: items remaining unclaimed will be disposed of after a suitable period. Private boat owners may leave slings along the wall behind their boats.

- Parking – Parking is allowed in the boathouse parking lot except during designated club row times.
- Private Boats, Oars and Equipment – Most of the boats on the four racks along the left (street-side) wall closest to the entry door are privately owned boats with assigned racks. The oars on the rack on the same wall are privately owned oars. Larger private boats will be clearly marked as private. Members may NOT use private equipment without explicit permission from the owner.
- Guest Policy – guest rows are free. However:
  - Guests in a 2x or a 4x must row in the same boat with the hosting member.
  - At least half the crew in a shell must be GHRC members.
  - Guests who want to use a GHRC 1x must have the permission of a board member and row with a current member.
  - No person shall row as a guest more than twice per season.

For exceptions to the above, consult a GHRC Board member.

- Swimming is prohibited on the creek.
- Trash and Recycling – Trash is picked up Monday and Thursday. The blue recycling bin (for paper, plastic, aluminum only) is picked up Thursday. Please keep the boathouse, docks and grounds clean, and recycle.
- Boathouse Procedures:
  - All boats are normally racked with the bow ball facing out of the boathouse. Exceptions made due to practical considerations (eg; Bow Mounted riggers, etc)
  - After rowing, all boats will be sprayed and sponged down and wiped dry before being put up clean.
  - The last person leaving the boathouse is responsible for securing it. This includes:
    - Back door is locked – handle and deadbolt.
    - Restroom light and fan are off.
    - Large ventilation fan is off.
    - Water to the shower and water hose are off.
    - Front door is locked – handle and deadbolt.
    - Both garage doors are down.
    - No equipment, water bottles, clothing, etc. are outside the boathouse.

## **Fostering Community Among GHRC Members**

Social GHRC

GHRC hosts a variety of social rows/events throughout the year. We are also responsible to our local community for yearly creek clean up.

#### How to reach GHRC Officers: Email is the best method

The GHRC board is open and receptive to all questions and concerns. A list of current GHRC Board members will be listed on the white erase board inside the boathouse along with their contact information. The board email is [GHRCboard@greaterhoustonrowingclub.com](mailto:GHRCboard@greaterhoustonrowingclub.com).

#### Volunteering at GHRC

GHRC has one of the lowest membership dues in Texas. These dues are low because the club is run by volunteers. GHRC does not maintain a paid staff. Our club grows membership through our efforts in organizing Learn to Row Days for the community. We also are known regionally as being a competitive club and need assistance through regatta coordinators. There are many opportunities to show support for your club, and we look forward to and appreciate your involvement.

#### Club Rows

Please note that if you show up during club row and do not own a private boat, you are required to participate in your designated boat as directed by the Athletic Director or coach during that row. If you would like to row a predetermined lineup using club boats, you must arrange for times to row together other than designated club row times. Club Equipment must be available for club row sessions.

## **GHRC Code of Conduct**

GHRC members are expected **to demonstrate points noted below, understanding that there could be violations other than those listed below.**

- **Show** good sportsmanship and courtesy in their interactions with all rowers and other boaters, coaches, coxswains, officials, and spectators on Oyster Creek, and at rowing venues elsewhere.
- **Members are expected to adhere to all club rules and notifications.**
- Members are expected to show curtesy to everyone at the boathouse and on the water
- Abusive, threatening behavior or foul language is a violation of the code of conduct
- To act as stewards of club equipment by treating it with care on and off the water
- To promote safety on the creek by following all of the safety, rowing competency, and other rules, policies, procedures, and criteria set forth in this Handbook.
- To have read and understand the GHRC Handbook and Bylaws.

The GHRC Board of Directors reserves the right to determine if violations of this code of conduct have occurred, and to take action, up to and including the decision to terminate membership of a club member if, in the opinion of the Board of Directors, violations of this code warrant such action. Members who are accused of violating the Code of Conduct or GHRC rules have the right to have a volunteer Independent Complaint Committee review and advise the board of directors on the violation.

Furthermore, GHRC does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their race, sex, religion, age (subject to the membership policies described above), disability (subject to the rowing competency requirements described above), color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, marital status, or veteran status. Discrimination or harassment on the basis of any such characteristics will be treated as a violation of the code of conduct.

## **Appendix: Know the Course – “The Bridges of Fort Bend County”**

There are three major courses channels leading away from the GHRC docks: the longest route – yellow in the map below – runs 5.75km downstream on the Lower course, and includes three navigable bridges; the other two routes, on the Upper Course, are an almost straight 1.4km to the NNW (red) to the bridge at US90A and a 2.4km partial loop (green) around the Fluor Daniel property that includes two navigable bridges.

Club boats must not pass under the US90A bridge at the upper end of the red route, or onto the American Canal where it connects to the yellow route about a ½ mile upstream from the sluice that terminates the lower course: ~5km from the lower dock.

The creek is not an “active” river, and so does not have sufficient current to scour the bed. This means that considerable shallowing can occur on the outside of the bends as well as on the inside. GHRC will post a map in the boathouse indicating known hazards on the river.

