



Safety Alert - Stay with the boat

In March this year, two rowers died at Iowa State University when their boat capsized in cold (4-5 °C), water and windy conditions. All five of the rowers had passed a swim test. A report contains the following “... we knew the water was cold. We decided that we all needed to swim to shore”. Had they decided to stay with the boat, and let the wind blow them to the shore, then the result may have been different. There is more information [here](#).

Only two British rowers have died accidentally after capsizing this century. One in 2000 and one in 2005. Both were competent swimmers and both chose to swim away from their boats.

If you fall in, what are you going to do? The simple answer is stay with the boat unless doing so will put you in greater danger (for example of being hit by a motorboat). There is further information in the British Rowing Capsize and Recovery online module [here](#), and to the Cold Water and Hypothermia module [here](#).

If you stay with the boat then it will keep you afloat. If you can climb on top of the boat then it will keep most of your body out of the water and reduce the rate at which you will get cold. It will also make you more visible and makes it easier to get into another boat than it would be if you were bobbing about in the water.

If you swim then you will put yourself at greater risk. It is not essential for rowers to be able to swim but they must be able to stay calm if they enter the water and be able to float, preferably by holding onto their boat. You should wear a buoyancy aid if you are not confident of your ability to stay calm and float.

If you are tempted to swim then please remember that the bank is always further than you think and it will take more time to swim there than you expect. Swimming wastes energy and energy is a precious commodity when you are cold and wet.

Do not forget to shout, wave and call for help if there is anyone else in the vicinity. It is OK to leave your boat when somebody offers to take you aboard theirs.

The advice to float and not to swim is also included in the to swim is RNLI [Respect the Water](#) Campaign and advice from the [Royal Life Saving Society](#). This is all supported by the [National Water Safety Forum](#).

If you fall in then do not swim, simply stay with the boat and float to live.

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October 2021

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