

Safety Alert - Rowing in isolated large Waves and Wash

Some boats are designed to be rowed through large waves and wash; racing shells are not. Recently an 8+ suffered structural damage when it was hit by a large wave. The wave hit the boat head on. Some parts of the boat were unsupported in the trough while water entered the parts of the boat that were on the crest.

Barriers to reduce the probability of the Hazard (Wave or Wash) causing a Hazardous Event

If possible, avoid rowing in areas or in conditions where large waves or washes occur. If you see a large wave or wash approaching then act early. Position the boat so that its centre-line is parallel to the wave front and tilt the boat so that it is lower on the side furthest from the wave or wash (as shown in the photo). Have the crew sit in the “safe” position and brief them to respond quickly (by raising or lowering their hands) to keep the boat in this position. Do not panic.

This will reduce the amount of water that enters the boat and reduce the stress on the hull.



Controls to reduce the severity of harm if a boat is struck by a wave or wash

Think about the boat buoyancy. In the first instance ensure that all hatch covers, etc. are correctly fitted.

The boat may comply with FISA rules but, in the event that it is swamped, additional buoyancy will improve the comfort of the crew. You can do this by installing buoyancy bags, of the type used in dinghies, in otherwise open areas such as under seats, and ensuring that they are securely strapped in place.

If the boat is struck by a wave or wash and takes on board a significant quantity of water, or structural damage is suspected, move it to the nearest safe area of shallow water. Take care because the wave height increases as depth of water reduces. The crew should then get out of the boat, remove the water and check for damage.

Before lifting the boat, use a bailer or bucket to remove as much water as possible, this should be available if there is a coaching launch in support. Then move the boat into deeper water and tilt it away from the bank. Lift it a little to pour the remaining water out of the boat.

Once you have removed the water from the boat, check the hull for structural damage. If any significant damage is found or suspected then tow or carry the boat back to the boathouse (or other place of safety). No crew member should still be in the boat if it is being towed by a launch.

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