

# AUSTIN ROWING CLUB

## WEATHER and WATER SAFETY

### POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

Austin Rowing Club has promulgated the following rules and offers the following guidance concerning weather and water-related safety conditions.

#### Rules

1. No boat, club or private, can be taken out if the **water flow rate** on Lady Bird Lake exceeds 8,000 cfs. When the water flow rate is between 6,000 cfs and 8,000 cfs, rowing is restricted to the boats and the areas of the lake described below. No restrictions apply when the flow rate is below 6,000 cfs, but rowers should still be cautious as the flow rate increases.
2. No boat, club or private, may be taken out if **thunder or lighting** have been observed during the previous half hour. If you are on the water and hear thunder and/or see lightning you must get off the water as soon as possible and seek shelter. Do not go back out until half an hour has passed since the last thunder or lightning.
3. Lights must be used when rowing in **low-light conditions** or in fog.

Disregarding these rules may be grounds for expulsion from club membership.

#### Important Guidelines

The following guidelines should be observed, depending on the combination of factors present, the experience of the rowers/crew and other conditions. Each rower is personally responsible for themselves, for any club equipment used, and for any other person their usage may affect. In the case of coached boats, the coach makes the call.

1. During **cold weather**, be guided by the “four-oar principles” described below.
2. Practice the common sense precautions described below in periods of **extreme heat**.
3. Be very cautious when **winds** are high. Small boats (singles, pairs, and doubles) should not go out when whitecaps are visible.
4. Be very cautious when **rowing in the dark**, even with bow lights. Less experienced rowers should not take boats out if there is poor visibility. Stay in more lighted areas.

The “Weather and Water Conditions” used for interpreting these rules and guidelines are constantly updated at <https://austinrowing.org/weather-water-conditions/>.

If rowers damage club equipment while disregarding these rules and guidelines, there will be a strong presumption of their financial responsibility for repairs or replacement.

The following sections provide more detail and background on these policies.

## Weather and Wind

Rowing safety decisions should be based on a combination of factors, starting with air temperature and wind speed, but also including water temperature, individual skill levels (rowing, swimming, etc.), preparedness, fitness, age, equipment chosen to row, etc. The ARC “Weather & Water Conditions” page has current weather conditions, live radar, water flow and water temperature. Members are responsible for understanding wind and weather conditions and exercising proper judgment when rowing. *Never take any untoward chances just to get in a row.*

**Cold Weather:** In team boats, the practical limit will be influenced by air temperature and wind speed. Smaller boats should be more cautious. Rowers should also take into account wind speed, wind chill and water surface chop. Prolonged periods of extreme cold may cause the lake water temperature to drop, increasing the risk of hypothermia for anyone in the water. The “four oar” principles provide the best general guidance:

a. If the air temperature is below 45 degrees all boats should have at least four oars if going out. Two or more singles may employ the “Buddy System,” meaning they will stay within 30 meters of each other, with speed dictated by slowest boat. Singles and pairs should not row alone in temperatures below 45 degrees.

b. If the air temperature is below 35 degrees, all boats should have at least four oars (no singles) and no boat should row alone (a coach or another four-oared boat should accompany).

**Hot Weather:** In very warm weather, excessive fluid loss may lead to dehydration and/or heat stroke. Take the following precautions:

- a. Drink plenty of water before, during, and after practice
- b. Plan activity level consistent with the degree of heat and personal fitness level.
- c. Limit your time in the sun.
- d. Use sun block.
- e. Wear light color clothing.
- f. Never consume alcoholic beverages while rowing (under any conditions).

**Wind:** High winds make it difficult to row safely and increase the risk of a boat flipping, which can lead to hypothermia and possibly death if the air and water temperatures are low. **Always stay with the boat if you flip.** If help is available, call for it. If help is not available, whether or not you can get back in the boat, get yourself and the boat to the shore as quickly as possible. Check the wind forecast before you go out. In general:

All boat classes can row in mild winds, up to 10mph. When winds rise above 10mph, small boats (singles, pairs, and doubles) should be aware of the associated dangers.

Winds faster than 12 mph generate choppy water and often form whitecaps. Whitecaps will be higher than the gunwales of small boats, making for a dangerous row. Though whitecaps may not be visible in front of the boathouse, they may exist elsewhere on the

lake. **If you see whitecaps on the water, small boats (singles, pairs, and doubles) should not go out.** Larger boats (8+, 4+, and 4x's) should use extreme caution when going out. **Err on the side of safety first.**

**Thunder and Lightning:** If you are on the water and hear thunder and/or see lightning you should immediately get off the water and seek shelter. Returning to the boathouse may be optimal if you are nearby. If not, seek shelter somewhere along the lake. If you are starting to launch from the boathouse and hear thunder and/or see lightning, return with the boat to the boathouse. ARC upholds a mandatory 30-minute wait after the last sighting of lightning or sound of thunder before trying to launch again. No one is faster than lightning. Lightning can travel up to 10 miles in less than a second. **Err on the side of safety first.**

### Other Conditions

**High Flow Conditions:** LCRA can release large volumes of water from the highland lakes upstream when those lakes are at or above capacity. The resulting high flow rates can create very hazardous conditions for rowing. A visual check of conditions at the boathouse will not necessarily reveal the flow rate. The ARC "Weather & Water Conditions" page has the current flow rate, as does LCRA's Hydromet site (linked on the ARC sign out computer) <https://hydromet.lcra.org/Reports/RiverStageFlow>. Select the "Colorado River at Austin" gauge.

### Flow Rate Criteria



The following are the water flow rate rules:

- a. Flow rate less than 6,000 cfs – use due caution, especially in smaller boats and especially in narrow or shallow stretches of the lake.
- b. Flow rate between 6,000 and 8,000 cfs – row only within the restricted area on the map shown above and singles must be Coach Certified Level 2 or higher.
- c. Flow rate over 8,000 cfs – unsafe to row, all boats.

**Debris:** Keep an eye out for debris on the water. This is especially important after storms and heavy rainfall. If you see large masses of grass, weeds, or other debris please do your best to row around and not through these masses. Warn other rowers and other craft if you see potentially dangerous debris.

**Lake Closure:** The City of Austin Fire Department (AFD) is the authority on lake closures. Unless such notice is posted by AFD, consider the lake open. However, please exercise good judgment and common sense before venturing out on the lake. At no time should you endanger yourself or club equipment.

**Low-Light/Visibility Conditions:** Lights must be used when rowing in low-light conditions or in fog. No boat should be on the water in the dark without proper lighting. Please notify a coach IMMEDIATELY if your boat does not have available lights, or if lights are not working properly. Lights should be attached, turned on, and operational PRIOR to taking the boat off the rack.

**Coaches:** In inclement conditions such as storms, high winds, rain, electrical storms, or fog rowing may be cancelled at the discretion of your coach. ***Disobeying your coach's orders to get off the water for safety reasons is considered grounds for expulsion from ARC.***

**Dockmasters:** In instances of imminent peril – lightning within 10 miles, severe weather alerts, storm cells tracking toward the boathouse – dockmasters may suspend launching until the danger has passed. Dockmasters should advise rowers on safety guidelines.

**Weather Websites:** ARC provides our official Weather and Water Conditions on our web page - <https://austinrowing.org/weather-water-conditions/>. Members may also use other weather resources – app or web site – to assist in their decision-making. Here is a partial list: [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov), [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com), [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com), [www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com), [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov).

The ARC Weather and Water Conditions page links to the best currently available data on conditions you will encounter while rowing, but these are not exactly what you will find on the water. In general, the weather on the water is usually more moderate than that reported at the nearest land weather station. The water temperature reading is taken from at the outlet of the Tom Miller dam, i.e. water from the bottom of Lake Austin. This is always several degrees colder than the surface water temperature on Lady Bird Lake. Continuing efforts are being made to provide the most accurate data on weather and water conditions.