

Safety Alert - Lights on Rowing Boats

It is that time of year when there are not enough daylight hours for us to be able to do all the things we want to do. Sometimes we will want to go afloat at night.

Darkness brings its own set of hazards and what can seem simple by daylight can become difficult and dangerous at night. It is important that boats show the navigation lights specified by their local navigation authority. The lights should be bright and clear. The purpose of navigation is to enable your boat to be seen and to enable you to see other boats. Not only should you be able to see them but they will also tell you something about what type of boat it is and where it is heading.

Lights should be fixed in the Empacher slot on the bow and at the top the rudder yoke in the stern. This will make them easy to see. If you mount the light directly onto the hull then ensure that it is not hidden by the saxboards. Lights can also be mounted on a pole on the stern behind the cox or in the bow in front of a steersman – although care must be taken to conserve night vision with this system. LED sticks on the back of the cox or bowman are also useful, although only as an addition to the main lighting system.

If you are rowing or sculling at night then wear white above the waist. High visibility clothing can also work well.

The following do not work and should be avoided:

Head Torches – the movement of your head ensures it cannot be seen from all directions.

Using only one light – unless it is on a pole that is higher than your head

Lights with Low Batteries – a failing or weak light is worse than nothing as it can give you a false sense of security.

Going Solo – the more people there are in a tight group the more likely you are to be spotted

Dark Clothing – a black wetsuit or compression top may well be warm but it can also make you invisible to other traffic

The rules on lights on boats can be different in each navigating authority so check with yours and make sure that you comply with them. The rules on the Thames in London are:-

“All rowing crews must have the following lights firmly fixed to their boat in low visibility.

On the bow: a flashing white light – flashing to determine direction of travel

On the stern: a constant white light The lights must be visible for 800m and also be visible through 180° – so that the boat effectively has lighting visible through 360°.”

(See page 15 of the PLA Guide “[Rowing on the Tideway](#)”.)

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