



BRITISHROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incident Reports in December

Near the finish of an internal club time trial, a 2x failed to round a bend and collided with a bridge abutment resulting in about 300 mm of the bows snapping off. The scullers were rescued from their boat by the safety launch. It is reported that this incident was caused by failure to keep an adequate lookout. This again demonstrates the importance of keeping a good lookout at all times.

There were four reported incidents that involved high water flow rates, two of which also involved weirs. Please ensure that extra care is taken when flow rates are high particularly close to weirs. For further information please see the Safety Alert – [Keep clear of weirs](#).

In one incident, a 1x was caught by the current and drawn towards the weir. The boat became stuck under a footbridge for a while but the sculler managed to row back to safety without any damage. Some clubs may wish to place marks on the bank upstream of weirs to warn their rowers when they are getting too close.

In the other report involving a weir, a 1x was caught by the flow and was unable to turn away from the weir. One blade went over the lip of the weir and the scull capsized to that side. The rower surfaced quickly upstream of the shell which had been washed onto the structure of the weir, where it abuts the sluice, and became wedged. The water level was high and the rower was able to climb out onto the structure of the sluice. The scull and blades remained pressed against the structure of the weir by the weight of water. The boat was later seen to break up and be washed away.

In another incident, a 4x+ was rowing downstream under a bridge when the heavy cross current took the stern of the boat toward the bridge, causing a rigger to hit the bridge. The boat was temporarily lodged against the bridge and held by the stream. The crew was able to free the boat without further incident.

In the last of these incidents, a 4x was forced to stop very close to the side of the river when being overtaken at speed by boats rowing two abreast. The high river flow rate pushed the 4x into a moored boat breaking a blade and damaging the stern of the boat.

In another incident, the engine of the coaching launch cut off for no apparent reason. Each time it was restarted, the engine it stopped as soon as it was put into gear. The stream was strong and the boat was dragged about 300 metres down river; the anchor did not hold. The launch driver managed to grab a passing post. He was dragged close to a post and managed to hold onto it. It is always prudent to check launch engines prior to use as described in the Safety Alert - [Outboard Motor Safety Checks](#).

C&RT responds to complaints about Magnet Fishing

One club has been plagued by magnet fishers; many of whom fish from bridges over the waterway and drop large magnets on lines from the bridges. These often fall close to passing rowing boats. Hazards are also caused by the magnet fishers obstructing the towpath with metal they remove from the waterway. They have also removed grenades and other explosive devices from the waterway.

The club has reported this activity to the Canal and River Trust several times. The Trust has recently expressed “very real concerns” in relation to this activity and explained that it is not allowed as it can be extremely dangerous. There is more information [here](#).

Incident involving an Emergency Services Response

A 2x hit an overhanging branch and capsized shortly after a 1x had also hit the bank and capsized. The coach was not present when the 2x capsized as he had rescued the rower from the 1x and was taking him or her back to the rowing club.

The 2x contained boys aged 16 and 17 who spent some time in the water but succeeded in climbing out of the water to sit on top of their inverted boat.

A passing dog walker called the Emergency Services and the incident was attended by five Fire Brigade crews together with a Fire Brigade Water First Responder crew, the Police and the Ambulance Service. The boys were recovered from their boat after reportedly spending 40 minutes in the water. They were very cold and wet, and were taken to hospital. It is understood that they spent one and a half hours in hospital being treated for hypothermia and under observation. The Police notified the rowers' parents of the incident.

This incident was reported in the local newspaper.

The mother of one of the boys wrote directly to me after first asking both the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) to investigate; the HSE suggested the MAIB and the MAIB suggested British Rowing. (I suspect that the MAIB gave the mother my email address as I have previously worked with them on other investigations and the MAIB receives these reports.)

I have since been liaising with the club Chairman. I was informed recently that the club has *“now received all the reports from the incident and reviewed them internally and as a consequence, and in order to learn from this unfortunate incident, we will be updating and strengthening our procedures and protocols. Our Club Safety Officers are working on this at the moment and I will share it with you once complete. The incident was a rare occurrence and has given us the opportunity to look at how we can mitigate any risks associated with situations such as this, so that if they happen again we are better prepared.”*

I will, of course, share any learning in a future report.

Safety advice for new members.

At a recent Regional Club Chairs (zoom) meeting I was asked to provide a one page note that clubs could use to highlight key safety messages to new rowers. The result is included in Appendix I. Please feel free to comment.

The information in this note is largely based on that in the following sections of [RowSafe](#):-

1.1. Roles and Expectations

2.2. Make up of Club Induction Pack

6.1. People new to Rowing

This is intended as an initial briefing only. The scope of knowledge and understanding is expected to expand as rowers develop their learning and experience.

Rowing and Epilepsy

There was a protracted exchange of comments and emails which started from a reported incident where a rower with epilepsy in a 1x capsized following a collision with a log. It was stated in the report that she was wearing a lifejacket “in line with British Rowing guidelines”. It was pointed out that the [British Rowing guidance on rowers with epilepsy](#) does not mention lifejackets. This guidance is replicated in section 8.6.2 of [RowSafe](#).

After further discussion it became clear that the rower and her club had acted with care to ensure the rower’s safety. They had consulted with her GP and consultant neurologist and obtained confirmation that supported her sculling. The consultant neurologist has been looking after her almost since she was diagnosed with epilepsy sixteen years ago and is familiar with her condition.

The only criterion in the guidance that the rower does not meet is that she has not been seizure-free for a year. Most of her seizures occur while she is sleeping. In sixteen years none of her daytime seizures have occurred during exercise. The consultant neurologist concluded that exercise counteracts the brain activity that would otherwise trigger a seizure. This is a feature of some kinds of epilepsy. This has a considerable impact on the probability of her having a seizure while in a boat.

The club has conducted a correct and thorough risk assessment of this activity and concluded that it is safe for this rower to go afloat in a 1x providing she is accompanied. The use of an auto-inflation lifejacket provides an additional measure of safety.

I have reviewed the club's risk assessment, and the epilepsy affects a single line of it. I propose to produce an update of it that documents formally the basis for this rower being on the water. I began by reviewing the template for the risk assessment on the British Rowing website. The scorings for severity and probability in this e-mail and the attached are consistent with it.

The guidance on Epilepsy contains the following statement that in certain circumstances (that apply in this case) “rowers, coaches (driving launches) and coxswains should not be allowed on the water, except where there is a special individualised risk assessment of the individual and the event”. The club’s risk assessment fulfils this criterion.

Support for another Rowing NGB

Support continues to be provided. The NGB has identified that its Incident Reporting process does not work as well as it would like. This was discussed at a Zoom meeting. Information on the culture of open reporting of incidents and sharing of learning that has developed within British Rowing over many years has been shared. The NGB has expressed the desire to promote this culture.

They also plan to issue Safety Bulletins (Newsletters), a draft was provided and comments were made. Advice was also provided on the frequency and level of detail of the content. It is easy to try to include too much and a risk that it can overload the recipients. It is always helpful to understand the objectives of such a bulletin and this was discussed too.

Information from Incident Reports

A Club Rowing Safety Adviser wrote to ask whether a question in the Safety Audit implied that he should monitor incidents other than those at his own club. The question mentioned was number 34 – “Does your club regularly monitor the British Rowing online reporting system to gather information on club incidents and use the statistics to develop safer practices?”

The response was that the question in the audit refers to incidents at your club. Incidents at other clubs may be less relevant if the venue where the other clubs row has different characteristics to the venue where you row. Incident reports are confidential and would not be if we permitted wider access. Each month I provide anonymous summaries of interesting incident reports in my Monthly Report. These are incidents where there is a potential for learning. We also complete an annual analysis of reported incidents and this is available [here](#).

We are currently working on the analysis of this year's incidents. It is too early to identify any learning from that yet but it is interesting to note that by the end of the year there will probably be about 1,500 reported incidents (compared with about 2,200 in the previous year). It is gratifying that in a year of reduced rowing activity, people are still keen to share what they have learned from their incidents. There were amusing comments in some reports that we will include in the analysis.

Avoiding collisions between rowers and Canoeists

This was discussed at a meeting of a river users' group at which it was suggested that there would be fewer collisions if canoeists were to navigate in the opposite way to other river users on the most popular stretch of river. Canoeists would then travel in the opposite direction to rowers and see the rowing boats approaching.

I expressed concern that rowing boats and canoes travelling in opposite directions on the same side of the river would tend to increase the probability of collisions. All the circulation plans that I am aware of involve all boats travelling in the same direction on any one side of the waterway.

In most cases they all travel on the starboard side and when they turn they remain on the starboard side. In that way all the boats on one half of the waterway are travelling in one direction and all the boats on the other side are travelling in the other direction. We have to rely on people keeping a good lookout in all directions but particularly ahead. This is not difficult for canoeists but can be a challenge for some rowers, particularly in coxless boats. They should be encouraged to look ahead at least once every five strokes and more often when near obstructions, bends, etc. It would also help if canoeists look astern from time to time.

Rowers and canoeists should be encouraged to provide an audible warning in the event of an imminent collision. This usually involves shouting. I feel sure that you will not have a problem in agreeing which words should be used.

The attachment of Backstays

There was a request from a club that launches and lands from narrow steps about the attachment of backstays to the outer ends of the riggers. They launch and land with the scull handle towards the bow, and swing the sculls around as the boat leaves the steps. With backstays fitted above the gate, then in a 2x (for example) the stroke could maintain current practice whilst bow has to change to handle towards the stern. They have experimented with one boat, and found it tricky to adopt the new practice safely.

It was pointed out that as far as safety is concerned then it does not make much difference whether the backstay is attached to the top of the rigger pin or some point on the end of the rigger near to the bottom of the pin. The purpose of the backstay (for safety) is to cushion the impact (by bending and absorbing energy) if the rigger hits another rower. The other safety function of backstays is the tendency they have to push another rower away from the boat rather than pull him or her closer (as in the case of a conventional wing rigger).

The reason why backstays are conventionally attached to the top of the pin is to support the pin so that it does not deflect during the drive phase of the stroke.

The following advice was provided in response to another query from another person at the same club.

If you are thinking of attaching backstays to an unsupported part of a boat (i.e. where there are no "ribs" of other supporting structure) then careful design will be needed. Care is always needed when point loading a monocoque (shell) structure. If it is a sculling boat then you may wish to add a transverse metal strut across and inside the boat, between the boat ends of the two backstays. This will tend to contain some of the rowing stresses within the metal structure and reduce their distribution into the hull of the boat.

Safety advice for Dragon Boat Canada

Rowing Boat Canada has decided to improve its safety guidance and has asked to be able to use the information in RowSafe on the understanding that British Rowing would be acknowledged as the source. This was agreed and an editable copy of RowSafe has been provided.

Working with Coastal Rowing WA Inc

Advice and support continue to be provided to Coastal Rowing in Western Australia, now known as COROW.

Coastal Rowing WA has produced a detailed risk management and safety plan. This was reviewed and feedback was provided. The feedback was that it was excellent and a few detailed opportunities for improvement were identified.

A further Zoom meeting was held to discuss progress and outline the training for new helpers that we have developed for use in the West Region. This consists of four modules, one of which deals with Rowing Safety. This discussion, together with the provision of the associated training materials, has prepared the COROW coaches to deliver this training to their new helpers.

Safety training within a club

There was a request for advice on the safety training that should be completed by Club Members, Coaches and Club Rowing Safety Advisers. The response started with the explanation about the online modules in RowHow. These can be found under the heading Online Learning [here](#). This was:-

- There are two Capsize and Recovery Modules, one for Rowers and one for Coaches.
- Safety Basics has been updated and now includes the material that was in both the old version of the Safety Basics module and the Intermediate Risk Management Module. Intermediate Risk Management has been withdrawn.

The following training was recommended:-

Members

- Capsize and Recovery for Rowers
- Cold Water and Hypothermia
- They should also be invited, but not required, to complete Safety Basics.

Coaches

- Capsize and Recovery for Coaches - this includes the material in the module for rowers but also covers how to set up and run a club capsize drill
- Cold Water and Hypothermia
- Safety Basics

Club Rowing Safety Adviser (CRSA)

- Capsize and Recovery for Coaches - I think it would be useful for the CRSA to know what Coaches are advised to do. Often the CRSA runs the capsize drill.
- Cold Water and Hypothermia
- Safety Basics
- Advanced Risk Assessment - Completing this is specified in the CRSA Job Description in section 3.4 of [RowSafe](#). This training is currently being updated to run under new software but the content of the new version will be largely unchanged.

Offshore and Beach Sprint Education Advisory Group

This is an *ad hoc* advisory group, supported, by World Rowing, to develop educational materials and sessions relating to Offshore and Beach Sprint formats. These materials include information on safety, this has been reviewed and feedback has been provided. Much of this feedback relates to safety at sea. The materials that have been reviewed are being made consistent with the approach and terminology used in British Rowing and with other safety training materials.

Electrical Safety in Club Premises

There was a request for information on the electrical testing requirements for equipment in club kitchens. This is far from easy because of the uncertainty about the status of rowing club facilities. Very simply they are not domestic dwellings, and they are not usually places of employment. The following information was provided.

The Health and Safety Executive guidance, "[Maintaining portable electrical equipment in low-risk environments](#)" says:-

"You must maintain electrical equipment if it can cause danger, but the law does not say how you must do this or how often. You should decide the level of maintenance needed according to the risk of an item becoming faulty, and how the equipment is constructed." The law referred to here is the [Electricity at Work Regulations 1989](#)

and

"Not every electrical item needs a portable appliance test (PAT). In some cases, a simple user check and visual inspection is enough, e.g. checking for loose cables or signs of fire damage and, if possible, checking inside the plug for internal damage, bare wires and the correct fuse. Other equipment, e.g. a floor cleaner or kettle, may need a portable appliance test, but not necessarily every year."

There is a new Regulation requiring landlords of residential properties "to have the electrical installations in their properties inspected and tested by a person who is qualified and competent, at least every 5 years. Landlords have to provide a copy of the electrical safety report to their tenants, and to their local authority if requested". There is a government announcement [here](#). This mostly relates to the wiring of the building (the distribution system).

There is some guidance in the Health and Safety Executive [Catering Guide No 12](#) but this is intended for kitchens where people are employed to work in catering. Most club kitchens do not qualify as catering kitchens. This indicates that, depending on use, the HSE view that testing every 5 years is appropriate.

There are some misunderstandings about Portable Appliance Testing (PAT). There is no requirement for this to be done annually, or at all. The requirement is that the equipment is in good (safe) condition. A simple visual examination as described in the Club Hub Safety in Club Premises guide [here](#) is usually sufficient.

In my view, a Rowing Club can be treated like a residential letting and the electrical distribution system should be inspected every five years. Portable electrical equipment should be checked before each use and subject to a more thorough visual inspection each year; these should be recorded and documents kept. However, it would be wise to check with your insurers as they may have requirements or recommendations.

There is further information in the Club Hub, Safety in Club Premises guide on Safety of electrical equipment and installations, [here](#).

Support for Advanced Risk Assessment updates

The Advanced Risk Assessment Training is being updated to run on new software. The materials have been reviewed and some opportunities for improvement were identified and addressed.

Appendix 1 - Safety advice for new rowers.

These are the 5 key things that new rowers should keep in mind.

1. If you do not know what to do then do not guess; ask someone who does.
2. If you have any medical or fitness concerns then talk to your coach or safety adviser.
3. If you cannot swim then wear a lifejacket when afloat and know how to use it.
4. Do not do anything that would put yourself or anyone else at risk.
5. Be prepared for the activity that you are about to do, eat, drink (hydrate), and dress appropriately.

As a new rower, you are expected to:

- Attend the club's Induction Programme and follow the advice and guidance in the Club Induction Pack (see [RowSafe](#) section 2.2).
- Be aware of and comply with the club's safety rules.
- Provide the club with relevant information such as your swimming ability.
- Inform the club of any reason that you may be at risk due to current or previous illness or injury; explain how the club can help you.
- Operate within your competence level by recognising your growing level of knowledge and understanding.
- Ask a coach or Club Official about any aspects of safety you are concerned or unsure about.
- Take responsibility for your own safety and the safety of others.
- Be aware of key club and sport policies and rules and where to find them.
- Report all incidents both within the club and to British Rowing.

Understand that everyone is expected to:

- Take responsibility for their own safety both on and off the water.
- Ensure that their actions both on and off the water do not put others at risk.
- Examine their own actions if they are involved in an incident and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Ensure that they have prepared for the activity that they are about to undertake, including having eaten appropriately and have sufficient drinking water.
- Ensure that they are dressed appropriately for the conditions and that their hair, if long, is restrained such that it does not interfere with their rowing.
- Be aware of, and abide by, the Club Safety Rules.
- Follow the guidance in the Club Safety Plans.
- Report all incidents both within the club and to British Rowing.