



BRITISH ROWING

# HRSA Monthly Report

October 2020

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

## Fatal Incident in the Netherlands

A 63 year old male rower died following a collision between a gig like rowing boat containing seven people and a cargo ship carrying sand at about 8:15 pm on Tuesday 13 October on the river Oude Rijn in Valkenburg, the Netherlands. Six of the rowers managed to get ashore themselves but one was pulled ashore by bystanders and resuscitated. It is understood that the rower who subsequently died and three other members of the crew were taken to hospital and the remainder did not need further treatment.

This is a translation of the announcement on the Roeivereniging Ferox Facebook page.

*"Today we received the message that our rower of the Bacchus men's team has passed away. We are upset and sad about this. He joined the association in 2019 and since then we have known him as an enthusiastic and highly involved association member. Typical of him, he was always there. Also last Tuesday he was on starboard three as always. Who could have thought that a nice Tuesday evening training would end up in such a drama? Unfortunately, he didn't survive the terrible accident, the collision between the Bacchus and the freighter. He only turned 63 years old.*

*We will miss him so much!*

*Goodbye!"*

The club rows in wide fixed seat boats where pairs of rowers sit side by side. Roeivereniging Ferox is a relatively new club which was founded in 2000.

It is understood that the Chairman has sent a letter of condolence to the club and to the Netherlands Rowing Federation.

There were two incidents in British Rowing in October where a rowing boat collided with a motor vessel. These were much smaller than the cargo boat and there was no significant harm but we may not always be so lucky.

## Incident Reports in October

### Boats swept by strong streams

There were several incidents where crews were swept into stationary obstructions by strong streams. These include being swept into guard posts at a weir, a boat moored to a pier, a bridge pillar, and against a tree. In many cases these happened when the boat was turning or spinning upstream of the obstruction.

In one case a launch went over weir when it was trying to protect the 8 that it was escorting. The 8 tried to spin upstream of the weir. The report contains the following:-

*"Attempting to prevent the 8 going down the weir, we positioned the launch close in alongside and in between them and the weir, putting the engine in neutral. Our attention at this point was on the 8 and not on our own position, the start of the weir being very difficult to see. Once the 8 had successfully spun, we realised that the launch had drifted towards the weir in the current, the engine was put back into gear but the propeller became grounded on the shallow bottom, the engine then cut out and despite paddling from the other two occupants, the launch was pulled over several drops before safely landing on the lower part of the river. It was then beached, and after an initial assessment of integrity, was carried up to the road, put in a car and taken back to the boat house. None of the occupants were injured."*

When rowing resumes, please advise rowers to turn downstream of obstructions or, if they have to turn upstream (e.g. of a weir) then to maintain a sufficient distance from the obstruction so that they can turn safely. It may help to show them the [Safety Alert on Weirs](#) and the [Safety Alert on avoiding being swept into danger](#).

### Mid River Collisions

There were several head-on collisions reported to be in the middle of the river or waterway. It is also possible that crews strayed onto the wrong side of the river. The reasons for crossing the centre line included inexperience, moved out to avoid anglers (2), and overtaking. Please advise crews to avoid crossing the centre of a waterway and if they have to do so then please advise them to use extreme care and maintain a good lookout. Wearing Hi-Vis kit would help too, see the [Safety Alert](#) on Collision Avoidance.

### Other Incidents

There was an incident where the steering of 4x failed. When questioned the response was that the “*4x wasn't checked before going afloat but there was no reason for it to be checked as it hadn't been out for weeks, if not months and as far as could be remembered there hadn't been any reports of the steering foot plate or the rudder not working correctly*”. I explained that these are compelling reasons why the boat should have been checked. References to the “[Check the Boat](#)” video and the relevant [Safety Alert](#) were also provided.

In another incident the reporter persistently tried to identify the ways in which the other crews should have acted to avoid the collision with her. She was encouraged to review her own behaviour and try to identify ways in which she could have acted to avoid the collision. This was discussed at a National Rowing Safety Committee meeting and it was suggested that the advice in the safety culture section of RowSafe should be modified to address this issue. This has been completed (see below).

In a further incident an outboard motor became detached from a launch, fell into the water and was lost. Please consider using bolts, in addition to clamps, to fix the outboard to the transom.

In another incident it was reported that a rower who has epilepsy is safe to row because, “*in line with British Rowing guidelines, she wears a self-activating lifejacket for every outing, and never sculls without somebody on the bank*”. This is not true. It was pointed out that there is no mention of the use of a lifejacket in the “[Guidance from the British Rowing Medical Panel on Rowing and Epilepsy](#)”.

## Working with Coastal Rowing WA Inc

Advice and support continue to be provided to Coastal Rowing in Western Australia. A further Zoom meeting is being scheduled to review progress and discuss any further information or advice that is needed.

This support and advice are highly valued. So much so that at least two of the members of Coastal Rowing WA have become individual members of British Rowing and the organisation has applied to become a British Rowing “Associated Organisation”.

## **Support for Rowing Ireland**

There has been a request from a former colleague at British Rowing to provide support for Chairman of the Rowing Ireland Water Safety Advisory Group who is also a newly appointed Club Support Officer.

The serious incident in Limerick in February 2019 was discussed and copies of Monthly Reports that contained advice on what had been learned from this incident was provided. Links to RowSafe, the archives of Monthly Reports and Safety Alerts and the latest Analysis of Incident reports were also shared. The feedback was that the information provided is already a valuable source for the Chairman and his colleagues on the safety committee.

An outline of the other material on the website that is not in the public domain was also provided. This includes online modules on Risk Assessment (both basic and advanced), Cold Water Immersion and Hypothermia, and the Capsize Drill (with separate modules for coaches and for rowers), all available [here](#).

## **Support for Dragon Boat Canada**

There was a request from a member of the safety and wellness committee of Dragon Boat Canada who are in the process of updating and revamping their safety documents. She thought that RowSafe is an excellent model for what they would like to do. She wanted to inquire about permission to adapt elements of the RowSafe document for Dragon Boat paddling.

The response was that RowSafe is in the public domain and can be accessed by anyone, anywhere. We also have other information and training courses that are not in the public domain. The ones on Hypothermia would be particularly relevant. I offered to review some of this material with her in a Zoom meeting (or similar).

As RowSafe is in the public domain then it could be adopted and a link inserted into the Dragon Boat Canada website. It is updated every year so this would be safer than hosting it on your website as the link would always be to the current version.

It may be possible to incorporate extracts from RowSafe into Dragon Boat Canada's safety guidelines providing the source of the information is acknowledged. I am able to provide RowSafe as a word document but would need to consult with colleagues before doing so.

## **Support for Scottish Rowing**

There was a request for help for members of a Scottish University Boat Club to access the Cold Water and Hypothermia online learning module. Most of the members are not members of British Rowing and cannot gain access. This matter has been referred to the Membership offices of both British Rowing and Scottish Rowing.

## **Progress with RowSafe**

There were technical problems in the production of the final document due to the change of software used. This change should make future revisions much easier to complete. The final proof reading and edits have been completed and the document is ready for publication. The presentation that summarises the changes has been revised and accompanies this report.

The recent changes include the addition of the following text in the section on Safety Culture:-

*Everyone is expected to:*

- *Examine their own actions if they are involved in an incident and identify opportunities for improvement.*

and

*Members should always:*

- *Report all the incidents that they see and consider how they could have been avoided.*

The new reference to the use of “Wellies” afloat has been removed pending further research, as explained elsewhere in this report.

## **Launch Safety**

There was a question about safety precautions in launches. In particular there was a request for advice on battery covers, fuel compartments, and extra kill cords.

The response was that there is information on launches in [Chapter 7](#) (Equipment) of RowSafe and on Launch Driving in [Chapter 5](#) (Competence). There is information on equipment to be carried on the RYA website [here](#); however, this largely relates to boats at sea.

There were some specific questions, the answers are:

- Battery boxes should always have a cover or lid made of a non-conductive material
- Fuel tanks should be fixed (e.g. tied) into the boat and
- An extra kill cord should be carried if there are two or more people on the boat so that if the driver falls in and takes his kill cord with him or her then the other person can start the motor and rescue the driver.

## Competence requirements for rescue boat drivers

There was a request for guidance on two issues relating to volunteer launch drivers with no Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Power Boat Level 2 qualifications. They relate to:

1. Helming a rescue boat if there is an incident on the water.
2. Coaches and Volunteers who have helmed a boat for many years and have competence gathered over the years.

The response was that the relevant statement in RowSafe is in section 5.2, Launch Driving, this includes:-

*Club Officers are expected to:*

- *Identify those members and others who are permitted to use the club's launches.*
- *Maintain a register of people permitted to drive its launches.*
- *Ensure that everyone who is permitted to drive launches is competent and suitably qualified to do so. The level of qualification required will usually be determined by the Risk Assessment but, in most cases, RYA Level 2 Powerboat (with a Coastal Endorsement if used on coastal waters) should be sufficient.*
- *Where a radio is carried, ensure that someone in the launch is competent to use it and knows which channels to use.*
- *Check the competence of its launch drivers from time to time.*

We will have to remove the reference to the Coastal Endorsement as the RYA no longer offers this qualification.

If we look at the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website we can find a useful definition of "competence" [here](#). It is "Competence can be described as **the combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely**. Other factors, such as attitude and physical ability, can also affect someone's competence."

There is no mention of qualification in the HSE definition; competence is task specific.

The competence needed to drive a coaching launch may not be sufficient to perform a rescue. The RYA has an additional qualification for Safety Boat drivers and this covers rescue techniques. The club should assess its drivers and determine which ones it believes to be competent for each task. It could conduct tests on driving skills and rescue techniques and keep records of the results.

It is up to each club to determine who is competent to drive its launches but please do this carefully. The tasks to be undertaken can be identified in your risk assessments. If the river environment is benign then this will impact on the level of competence required. Evidence of training (i.e. qualifications) is important and relevant but is not the only indication. There are people who have few, if any, qualifications but who can perform some tasks very well.

However, please be careful because some navigation authorities require launch drivers to be qualified and your insurers may have their own requirements.

## Buoyancy Aids for Juniors

There was a request for information on which is the most appropriate Personal Floatation Device for J12 & J13 rowers. The response was as follows:-

As a general rule, buoyancy aids are recommended for people who expect to enter the water, or where it is very likely that they will do so. These include kayakers (especially on white water), sailors of small dinghies, water skiers, wind and kite surfers, etc. These people often also wear wetsuits. Lifejackets are used by people who do not expect to enter the water but who may do so unexpectedly. Rowers, coxes, coaches, etc. fall into this category.

Buoyancy aids normally provide 50 Newtons (N) of Buoyancy and inflated lifejackets provide 150 N. 275 N lifejackets are normally only used offshore.

There is a problem when buying manual inflation lifejackets for juniors. Most small lifejackets are bought by parents for their children and the parents want them to be auto-inflation. If you want small size manual inflation lifejackets then there is a fix for this and this is described in the September 2018 Monthly Report where it says:-

*The rules of racing, and common sense, require that coxes of bow loaded boats wear manual inflation lifejackets. This is also specified in RowSafe section 7.3, Safety Aids. They should not wear buoyancy aids or auto-inflation lifejackets as these will tend to hold them in an inverted boat should the boat capsize.*

*Unfortunately, manual inflation lifejackets are not available in a small size. The best available solution is to remove the firing head from the actuation mechanism and replace it with a blanking cap. These are proprietarily available devices obtainable from lifejacket suppliers. There is more information at <http://www.crew-safe.co.uk/acatalog/United-Moulders-Blanking-Cap.html>*

*There is a problem with this approach because, although it converts an auto-inflation lifejacket into a manual inflation one, as required, it does not change the appearance of the lifejacket and it will still appear to be an auto inflation lifejacket. Clubs should take great care to ensure that users know which type of lifejacket they are using. It may help if all a club's auto inflation lifejackets are one colour and the manual inflation ones are all a different colour.*

## Waterproof Cases for Mobile Phones

There was a question about the buoyancy of mobile phones in waterproof cases. One rower found that theirs did not float. Luckily, they located the phone at the bottom of the river.

If you search the internet for “floating waterproof phone case” page you will find many, some of them are not very expensive. Some seem to have an air pocket around the outside. Alternatively, a cork or similar floating object may be able to be inserted inside the case or tied to it, or the case can be attached to the rower or to the boat.

It would be prudent to test the phone in its case in a bucket of water rather than in the river. This will make it much easier to retrieve.

## Risk Management and Risk Assessment

There was a question about the difference between Risk Management and Risk Assessment. Completing a Risk Assessment is a two step process, the first step is to produce a Risk Management plan.

The term "Risk Management Plan" is not a good descriptor but it was the best available. The risk management plan approach was developed as a first step in the development of a risk assessment because:-

- we needed something simple for coaches on the level 2 course
- coaches had difficulty with completing the full risk assessment
- the risk assessment looks difficult and people were apprehensive when faced with the template
- we wanted to provide a simple way of thinking about risk and taking the appropriate precautions

The Safety Basics training shows that the Risk Management plan simply lists:

- the Hazards,
- the Hazardous Events that each hazard can cause,
- the Barriers that reduce the probability of a Hazard causing a Hazardous Event and
- the Controls that reduce the harm caused by a Hazardous Event should it happen

The vulnerable area of this process, and all other risk assessment methodologies, is that sometimes hazards are missed. We try to help with this by providing a list of different types of Hazard. There is further help in RowSafe with pages of examples of Hazards, Barriers, Hazardous Events and Controls.

The thinking that the risk management plan encourages helps a coach at the start of an activity to review the conditions etc. and decide what to do. The coach can quickly identify the Hazards that are present at the time (weather, stream speed, obstructions, other water users, etc.) and think about the Hazardous Events each could cause. They then think about how to stop the hazards causing the hazardous events (the Barriers) and what can be done to reduce the harm should a hazardous event occur (the Controls). This is intended to be a mental process but it is best learned by compiling a few written examples.

They can decide whether it is safe to do what they planned to do with the people present or whether more Barriers or Controls are needed. It is important to take the capabilities of the rowers into account. The club 1st 8 may be able to cope with conditions that would overwhelm a J13 1x.

The Risk Management Plan helps because the Hazards, Barriers, Hazardous Events, and Controls can be copied directly into the Risk Assessment. All that remains is to identify the actions needed to keep the Barriers and Controls effective, identify the harm that a hazardous event could cause and estimate the severity of harm that could be caused and the probability of that level of harm resulting.

RowSafe expects that all Club and Competition (new name for Event) Rowing Safety Advisers have completed the Advanced Risk Assessment training so that they are able to complete Risk Assessments.

## Wellies

There was a question relating to the planned change to RowSafe that advised against wearing “wellies” when afloat.

This all started with an article in a yachting magazine some time ago. There was a test in a swimming pool with a new young member of staff. He was wearing garden wellies and tried treading water. He would have drowned were it not for the fact that someone had the forethought to attach a rope to him so that he could be hauled out.

The issue with water in wellies is nothing to do with weight, it is all about viscosity. Below the surface in a body of water, the water has mass but it does not have any weight. You can think of it as neutrally buoyant.

There are several techniques for treading water. One involves lifting alternate feet slowly and pushing them down quickly. The viscous drag of a body moving through water is proportional to the square of the velocity so slow movements up and quick movements down tend to result in a net upwards force over a period of time. It allows people to keep their heads above water.

The effect of loose garden wellies is a bit more complex. As the foot is lifted the wellie tends to splay open, increasing its horizontal area and tending to increase the downward force. As the foot is pushed downwards the wellie collapses against the person's leg, reducing the horizontal area and resulting in a small upwards force. The net effect is that there is a downward force on the person and they sink. This causes them to panic so they tread water faster and sink more quickly.

Wearing waterproof trousers over the wellies, particularly if they are fastened at the ankle should prevent this from happening.

Lifejackets help but these sometimes take a second or two to inflate. In this time a panicking person may have sunk deep enough and inhaled enough water to cause permanent harm.

I have been trying to find further evidence for this recommendation and until it is found then we should wait until knowledge is more certain. If I can find sufficient evidence that could be shared in a safety alert.

## **Advice on Covid Safety**

There have been several requests for advice relating the rules for rowing in the pandemic. Some have related to clubs who are situated in one tier area with members who live in a higher tier area. Some of the advice provided has been rendered obsolete by the recent announcement of a National lockdown, at least until December 2 so that will not be summarised here.

There was an enquiry about what constitutes a “close contact” who would be required to self-isolate if their contact tested positive. My understanding is that this is a matter for NHS Test and Trace as it is this organisation that can require people to self-isolate. One of the problems with this disease is that nobody ever really knows, in individual cases, where and how it was contracted. I expect that the Test and Trace system is set up to be cautious and apply the precautionary principle. I think that this is just something that we are going to have to learn to accept and cope with.

If you have any questions then, if you are...

- an individual member - you should contact your club in the first instance to understand their COVID-Secure protocols.
- a club (including a school or university boat club) - please contact our Club Support team via [clubsupport@britishrowing.org](mailto:clubsupport@britishrowing.org)
- an event or competition - please contact our competitions team via [onlineentry@britishrowing.org](mailto:onlineentry@britishrowing.org)