



BRITISHROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incident Reports in October

Take care of the straps and anything that can snag a lifejacket

A stern loaded 4x+ capsized while rowing at low rate; as the boat rolled over, something on the cox's life-jacket got caught on the steering wire. The manual inflation toggle also appears to have been snagged and the lifejacket inflated. This resulted in the cox being held underneath the boat by the inflated lifejacket. The boat was immediately turned upright again by the crew, at which point the cox came free and floated to the surface next to the boat having been submerged for about 5 to 10 seconds. The crew and cox were recovered from the water.

Bigger boats can capsize too

An 8+ with an inexperienced crew capsized when the coach asked the crew to do 'rigger dips'. They did not perform this task together, and some were very erratic and allowed the boat to spend too much time on one side causing the boat to capsize. The crew were rescued and the boat recovered with the help of other nearby coaching launches.

Take care when moving items in the boathouse.

A boat racking trolley was being moved to allow access to a boat on wall mounted racking. The stern of a 1x was caught in the blade rack and this caused the 1x to fall onto the floor and sustain major damage.

Take care when handling boats on land

A rower slipped on a puddle of water when entering the boat bay resulting in both rower and a 2- falling to the ground. The rower did not sustain any injury but the boat was cracked along the majority of the circumference of the shell. Please take care, remove puddles of water and wear the correct footwear.

Take care when handling other equipment

After an outing, a launch was recovered to the boathouse and a rower lowered the outboard into the into the run position. This is normal practice at this club. The rower caught his fingers between the outboard and the mounting bracket. This caused minor bruising and a slight cut to the fingers. Fortunately the outboard was lowered slowly and not dropped as this would have made the consequences much worse.

Take care to give clear commands on land

A rower was hit on the head by a rigger as a boat was being launched. This was caused by the lack of clear commands and other people in the vicinity talking. When putting a boat on the water, the rower could not hear the commands and so was not ready for the lifting and turning of the boat to place it on the water.

Take care to give clear commands on the water too.

Collisions can be avoided

A 2- was heading upstream and a 4- was heading downstream. They saw each other late and had to perform emergency stops. Both crews responded quickly and effectively to stop the boats. The waterway is not wide enough for two boats to cross at that point.

Please keep a good lookout, be alert, and avoid collisions.

Take care when carrying a phone in a boat

Boathouse keys and a phone were dropped into the water during an outing and a rower felt the need to leave the boat and enter the water to attempt retrieval. The club thought it appropriate to stop carrying phones in boats and ensure that boathouse keys are attached to a lanyard.

The club was advised to continue to carry phones as these provide the ability to call for help, particularly in the event of a serious incident. Each phone should be in a waterproof pouch attached to a member of the crew.

Take care to avoid the shallows

An 8+ attempted to overtake a 4+ that was rowing in pairs on the inside of a bend. The cox of the 4+ shouted a warning that the river was shallow at this point and the cox of the 8+ shouted back that she was aware of this. The 8+ then grounded on the shallows bringing it to a complete halt.

In another incident a 4x- clashed with a 4+ that was in the middle of the river because the 4+ was trying to avoid the shallows. Please take care to give other crews plenty of space so that they can avoid hazards like this.

In another incident an 8 ran aground shortly after launching at low tide. This resulted in the boat being punctured by a piece of metal that created a tear in the boat about a foot long, going right through to the footwell of the 3 seat.

Take care to keep a good lookout, wherever you are

There was a collision between a 4x and a 1x when the 1x allegedly rowed into the path of the 4x.

There was another incident where a 2x was coming down the side of the docks, whilst two other crews were doing race pieces further up. A member of the 2x crew suffered from cramp and tucked in against the wall as close as possible whilst the rower attempted to stretch out to be able to row again. Unaware of this, the two crews doing race pieces continued to row. As they approached the 2x, it became apparent they did not see them. The crews collided.

It is important that ALL Crews keep a good lookout even if they are on the correct side of the waterway. There are many obstacles to look for, not just wandering scullers. Do not expect dogs, logs, swimmers and paddleboarders to know which side of the river they should be on.

Get help to see where you are going

The fin of a 4+ hit a partly submerged log and was damaged because the cox did not see the log. The club was advised that it is often a good idea to have the bow person look around for obstructions dead ahead of the boat; these can be logs or other boats.

Take care around Paddleboarders

A 2x collided with a paddleboarder travelling in the same direction both on the correct side of the waterway. The paddleboarder suffered a cut to the ankle that subsequently became swollen, and the board was damaged. Please keep a good lookout ahead.

Action after a capsize

There was an incident at the end of a long distance sculling race when a sculler in a 1x capsized and had some difficulty in getting free of his boat. There was also some concern in the time it took the safety boat to approach him and the actions of other rowers in not going to his assistance.

Please be aware that heel restraints are important and should be adjusted correctly. There is more information in the Safety Alert on Heel Restraints [here](#). Please note that new boats may be delivered without the heel restraints being attached. There has been communication from the RRSA to clubs in the Region to encourage them to ensure that heel restraints are checked and maintained in good condition.

Please instruct safety boat drivers not to delay when a boat capsizes. They should approach and assist immediately.

Rowers should be taught how to perform Buddy Rescue as part of capsize training. Please reinforce the message that they are expected to assist anyone who needs their help.

Take care when coming alongside

A volunteer parent tried to assist with the landing of a boat onto the rowing club stages. They used their hand in an attempt to push the bow away from the landing stage. Unfortunately they were unable to redirect the boat and their hand became trapped between bow and landing stage causing significant damage to their thumb. This required medical attention in hospital. Please instruct your volunteer helpers on the correct approach to take.

In another incident a rower had their foot caught between the boat and the landing stage. This resulted in a visit to the minor injuries unit in the local hospital. Two bones in the foot were fractured and the rower will be in a supportive boot for four to six weeks.

Others have the right to use the waterway too

There was a note in one report involving a collision with a kayak that *“with increased water usage, canoes and SUPs, I am afraid these type of accidents are going to happen more regularly especially on busy waterways.”* My response was that *“Collisions are not inevitable. All collisions are avoidable but the greater use of the waterway requires everyone to take greater care both in keeping a good lookout and slowing down in areas where the view ahead is restricted.”* I later added that *“Some people choose to row at times when their water is less congested, and some are assisted by coaches and spotters on the bank. Other people have the same rights to enjoy being afloat as we do and we have to find a way to manage the risk that this poses. It may help if the clubs meet to discuss how they can work together and agree a plan for the future. This may include a circulation plan.”*

Take care with your wash

A group of kayakers were inconvenienced by the wash from a rowing coaching launch that did not slow to reduce the wash. The wash came far over the cockpits and nearly caused the kayaks to capsize.

Keep clear of vessels towing

There was a near miss between an 8 and a tug towing a large barge. Please be aware that vessels towing cannot stop quickly as they are at risk of being hit by the vessel they are towing. They may also be “constrained by their draft” and are almost certainly “restricted in their ability to manoeuvre”. Please keep well clear of vessels towing.

Take care when driving a launch

A launch capsized due to the driver increasing speed rapidly, the launch being unstable due to much of the weight being in the stern and the choppy water. Another club sent out their launch to recover the one that capsized. The engine flooded in the capsize and stopped working. Adding weight to the front of the launch will help to make it more stable when it is tiller steered and there is only one person in the launch.

In another incident a rowing coach in a catamaran launch tried to rescue a kayaker who was in difficulties at the side of river. She had capsized but was unable to recover into her kayak. The launch driver took his launch to her and she tried to climb onto launch. He went to help her and launch started to tip. The driver slid partway into the river. The driver recovered back into the launch and took up a position on the far side of the launch so that it was balanced as the kayaker climbed onto the launch. The kayaker and the kayak were returned to the quay. Please keep in mind the stability limitations of catamaran launches and act accordingly.

Support for Rowing Ireland

A colleague in Rowing Ireland has asked whether they could use RowSafe in the formulation of a Rowing Ireland Row Safe document. This was agreed and an editable version of RowSafe has been provided.

What to do if a 4x or 8x loses a blade in a race

I was asked for advice on what a crew sculling boat should do if a crew member loses control of a blade during a race and the crews were not able to maintain a straight course. The answer in the short term is to then stop and recover the blade before resuming the race.

However, the longer term solution is to think about prevention rather than managing the aftermath. I believe that this is basically a competence issue. If blades are under-square at the catch then they will tend to go deep making the extraction difficult. Also 4xs and 8xs tend to move quickly and this can cause issues at the finish if the extraction is not clean and neat. Both of these causes should be focuses for coaches. This is a general point not just one relating to blades caught in the water.

Crews should be competent and capable of completing whatever event that they are entered into; they do not have to be fast enough to be potential winners but they should be able to get from the start to the finish without impacting on any other crews. In section 4.6 of [RowSafe](#) it says:-

“Participating Clubs

Officers of participating clubs are expected to:

- *Ensure that all their competitors are able to complete the course safely and are properly equipped (e.g., appropriate kit, carry water, etc.).”*

Coaches should be advised to only enter crews into competitions if they are sufficiently capable and competent to be able to complete the course without hampering other competitors.

Our Approach to Rowing Safety

There was a further request, forwarded by our Chairman, from an American student as described in last month's report. The student has subsequently written with further questions relating to the presentation on the [Analysis of Reported Incidents in 2021](#). The responses are summarised below:

Anti-social behaviour is discussed on page 35 of the presentation. Each Incident, in the analysis is assigned one cause. For example, if a boat is involved in a collision because of the failure of someone to keep an adequate lookout then this will be classified as "Poor Lookout" even if there is some subsequent swearing or other antisocial behaviour.

Other examples of antisocial behaviour include:

- creating an excessive wash
- verbal abuse and swearing
- throwing objects at rowers (or dropping them from a bridge)
- erratic driving of a non-rowing boat usually when appearing to be under the influence of drink or drugs
- obstruction caused by badly moored boats
- intentional obstruction by people in boat launch and recovery areas
- assault, or threats of assault
- theft

There were also some Covid related incidents as described on page 35.

This sounds dreadful but antisocial behaviour is not particularly common and usually not serious.

The other questions were:

- 1) how do you define the difference between significant incidents and simple capsizes? are simple capsizes those that did not result in injury?
- 2) Does poor lookout constitute the accidents that occurred from running into something and it being the rower/coxswains fault/ poor lookout in that aspect?
- 3) what do "other tragic health related incidents" refer to? anything specific or just any injury that was predisposed and unrelated to the rowing environment?

The answers were:

1. A simple capsizes is one in which there is no harm (other than a rower getting wet and a little cold). All other Incidents are considered to be significant. Near Misses, for example, are considered to be significant even though there is no harm, because they provide learning opportunities.
2. We try to avoid the concept of fault because it tends to generate argument and disagreement. It is better to think about what we will do next time to avoid incidents. It is all about learning. "Poor lookout" is used to categorise an incident where had a better lookout been kept then there would not have been an incident. Unfortunately, in rowing, some effort is needed to keep a good lookout.
3. "Tragic incidents" are normally those that are fatal. They are usually cardiac related incidents that occur to people involved in rowing or coaching, whether afloat or on land, in and around rowing clubs or events. They do include incidents involving indoor rowing. There may be a predisposition but we would probably never know that. These incidents

are rare, there are usually less than 4 each year out of about 2,000 reported significant incidents. We have been encouraging clubs to have, or have access to, defibrillators, and their members to have CPR training in an attempt to address this. You may have seen reference to these in my Monthly Reports.

There was also a request from a coach in the UK who is in the second year of the British Rowing Level 4 coaching course and is contemplating a Work Based Project on 'the Safety risks to older single scullers paddling and possible mitigation measures'. He is currently doing research into the project and would like to see the latest British Rowing Analysis of Significant Incidents Report. He is also interested to know what advice or formal instructions are offered by British Rowing to mitigate safety risks to older single scullers.

The response was that the Incident Analysis can be found, in the public domain, on the British Rowing website [here](#). The Incident Reporting system does not ask for the age of people involved in incidents so this cannot be included in the analysis. We do not provide any specific advice for the older rower but some of the advice in [RowSafe](#), particularly the health advice is more relevant to this group.

Do not be afraid to shout

The primary means of avoiding collisions are to keep a good lookout and keep to the correct position in the waterway. There are also times when a crew will have to change course or stop to avoid a collision. However, there are times when shouting a warning to another crew can assist in collision avoidance. If you do shout then do so loudly and clearly and repeat the warning if necessary. State the boat type that you are trying to alert and indicate the action they should take. For example you could say "Four Look Ahead" or "Sculler Stop".

Cylinders in new lifejackets

I was recently advised by the RNLI that there have been problems with some new lifejackets accidentally inflating during shipping. As a result, some suppliers have then shipped with the cylinders not fitted to the lifejacket. If you receive a new lifejacket then please ensure that the cylinder is correctly fitted before it is used.

The role of the CRSA

Some wrote to ask about the role of the Club Rowing Safety Adviser. The response was that section 3.4 of [RowSafe](#) contains the CRSA Description.

Minimum age for rowers and rowing with a visual impairment

I was asked for guidance on these issues. The response was that as far as safety is concerned, we do not have an age limit. I assume that all of our [safeguarding advice](#) is followed during your rowing activities.

I have coached rowers as young as nine but this needs care. It is not simply a matter of age but we should also consider physical development and mental maturity. We would be careful not to encourage or permit activities that are too strenuous or stressful. For this reason it may be better for young rowers to use lighter boats (skiffs rather than gigs) and to limit their rowing to sheltered waters.

As a general rule, sculling is preferred to rowing for athletes under the age of 16. At this age muscle development is in advance of skeletal development. The concern here is not to overstress joints. Sculling is a symmetrical activity whereas rowing is not symmetrical and involves a little twisting. I understand that gig rowing clubs can address this by ensuring that young rowers alternate sides each outing (or change sides during an outing). It is also important to coach good technique as injuries can be result if the technique is not good and bad habits can be difficult to rectify.

At our regattas in the West of England we sometimes have races for twelve year olds but these are usually over a shortened course.

We are keen to encourage people with disabilities to learn to row. A visual impairment should not be an obstacle to a person learning to row but please take care to ensure that they can do so safely. You will need to consider individuals as the degree of impairment may vary considerably from person to person. Please use your risk assessment to define the precautions that you should take. Please consider all the relevant activities such as launching the boat, entering the boat, rowing, getting out of the boat and recovering the boat to land or its mooring.

Please also consider what can go wrong. It may be that you will conclude that some young rowers with a visual impairment should wear lifejackets. If you do then please ensure that all young rowers in the crew do so. Please avoid singling out people who have impairments.

Water quality and pollution

Concerns have been expressed by the Angling Trust and British Canoeing. There is more information on Water Quality on the British Canoeing [Clear Access Clear Waters](#) website and on the Angling Trust [Anglers Against Pollution](#) website. There are several local Citizen Science projects on water pollution, simply Google "UK water pollution citizen science projects".

The Angling Trust has a Water Quality Monitoring Network, there is further information [here](#). This contains the following:-

Monitors will record data in situ using the Epicollect5 data gathering platform on their mobile phone with the option to record data at home using a PC. Epicollect5 is a proven solution which is free and easy to use ([five.epicollect.net](#)). Observations will be measured against Statutory and Water Framework Directive standards for levels of chemicals. The methodology is based upon a proven approach developed by the Wye Salmon Association ([Water Quality - The Wye Salmon Association](#)) with the help and support of Cardiff University.

Launch Driver Qualification

There has been some discussion about testing requirements for launches and the qualification requirements of launch drivers. It is understood that some information on this has been circulated to clubs and an amended version may be circulated soon. This includes an indication that the Environment Agency (EA) and the Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA) may specify qualification requirements for launch drivers on the waters where they are the navigation authority. This is being discussed by the MCA and Navigation Authorities. This is a matter for the Navigation Authorities.

There are several statements in different parts of RowSafe on launch driver competence but the most detailed one is:-

- 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 should be sufficient.

I feel that it is important to understand that:-

- RowSafe contains guidance and advice, it sets out expectations
- We advise clubs, etc. to ensure that their launch drivers are competent. It is a matter of competence and not of qualification. Some unqualified drivers are perfectly competent by virtue of their education, experience and training (the HSE definition of competence).
- The requirements for competence depends on the waters where the driver will operate. For example, I am qualified and competent to drive a safety boat on the sea (this is well beyond RYA Level 2) but I do not think that I am competent to drive a coaching launch on the Tideway as I am not familiar with the navigation rules there (there is no reason why I should be).
- Risk Assessment is the vital tool that clubs should use to determine the competence requirements for their drivers. (One size does not fit all.)
- RYA Level 2 Powerboat is a well-established, well recognised and well respected qualification. The RYA has invested in it to ensure that there are clearly defined and relevant requirements and they have an approved instruction and testing structure. We could not hope to build an equivalent system that would be recognised by the authorities (C&RT, EA, PLA, etc.) and the insurance industry without significant investment.

Some clubs have defined their own competence requirements and training schemes for the waters where they operate. This seems appropriate providing the specification is based on their risk assessment and that this risk assessment is of good quality and is “suitable and sufficient”.

Safety in a Learn to Row course

A “graduate” of a Learn to Row course recently provided the following feedback:

- There was a total absence of any safety information or guidance of hazards in and on water.
- When our instructor was asked about safety instructions his response was that participants had too much to absorb from the current session and in any case the boats don't capsize.
- The subject was not raised or discussed at any other session and we went on water without lifejackets or any idea of what to do in case of an incident.
- There was a plethora of new terminology which overloaded some participants as it was assumed it would be heard, understood, remembered and immediately acted on which is a teaching error and easily remedied with some simple handouts at the start of the course.
- The on-water sessions were conducted in 4+s with short sessions of individual rowing alone it was clear that the underlying intention was to get everyone rowing together. Learning rowing technique and rowing as a crew member are obviously very different activities and putting four or five people with minimal or no rowing experience in a boat together to get them to row as co-ordinated crew is not a good method to teach rowing technique to non-rowers.
- My sense of the course I did was that it had a competitive culture underpinning it and the idea that you might be interested in rowing for mental health, physical health or to be connected to nature was not a serious option.

My response was focussed on the safety issues but also extended to some coaching issues.

It is not unknown for four seat rowing boats to capsize, this does not happen often but it does happen. The basic protocol for anyone in a boat that capsizes is to stay with the boat and:-

1. Get free from the boat
2. Get out of the water
3. Get off the water

Rowing boats are buoyant even if swamped or immersed and will support the weight of the crew. Getting out of the water often involves climbing on top of the inverted boat.

I usually explain the safety features of a rowing boat to new rowers before they go afloat for the first time. This should reassure them. I tend to focus on buoyancy and the presence of heel restraints (the strings that connect the heel of the shoe to the bottom of the footplate). These help you to pull your feet out of the shoe if you capsize.

For future reference there is a glossary of rowing terms on the British Rowing website [here](#). It is a pity that nobody told you about this in time for the course.

There is a great range of ethos in clubs. Some clubs are highly focussed on competition, some are more relaxed and are just interested in helping their members to have fun afloat, and some have separate groups that cater for each type of rower.

My preference, when coaching new rowers, is to introduce them to the basic range and sequence of movements indoors on a rowing machine and then to help them afloat in a single seat boat with stabilising floats. In this way they can learn at their own pace and not have to be concerned about keeping in time with anyone else. This makes the whole exercise more relaxed and enjoyable. I often tell people that all they have to remember to do is relax and smile.

Once a new rower has developed the skills they need to be able to row safely then they can decide for themselves how they want to proceed. This may involve training for competition or simply having fun afloat. It is their decision.

British Rowing teaches "rower focussed coaching", by this we mean helping the rower to define, and achieve, their own objectives.