



BRITISHROWING

# Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

May 2023

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

## Incident Reports in May

### Take care on bends in waterways

There have recently been several collisions and near misses due to inaccurate steering and lookout failures on bends. These include: -

- A 4- having to do an emergency stop when it rounded a bend to see a group of Kayakers spread across the whole width of the river.
- Another 4- having to do an emergency stop when it rounded a bend to find a 1x going in the opposite direction on the wrong side of the river.
- A collision between an 8 and a 2- close to the centre of the river.
- A near miss between two 1xs travelling in opposite directions. One of the 1xs was doing a 20 stroke, did not look ahead and did not see the other 1x come round the bend. Fortunately, the rower in the other 1x was paying attention.
- A low-speed collision between a 4- and a 2- when the 2- rounded a bend and assumed that the 4- was facing in the same direction that they were.
- An 8 and a 2x collided after the 2x rounded a corner and onto the wrong side of the waterway.

Please take extra care at corners and bends, keep to the correct side of the waterway, keep a good lookout and, if necessary, reduce speed.

### Incidents involving canoes, kayaks and SUPs

There continues to be reports of incidents involving canoes and kayaks. In May there was an incident in which a 4x was rowing at speed and encountered kayakers who then spread out across the entire river.

As the 4x went through one of the kayakers started shouting that they'd moved out of the way. It was explained that their positioning was still dangerous. One of the canoe coaches came over in a launch and said that the 4x shouldn't have been doing a piece as they were doing pieces and that we should have stopped and waited.

The 4x pointed out that they were already mid-piece, and that the kayakers only started theirs when they saw the 4x coming, and that they should have waited and been more considerate with their river positioning. There would be no danger of the 4x doing pieces at the same time if we passed port-to-port, sticking to the agreed navigation pattern.

Please continue to report these using the British Rowing Incident Reporting system but incidents involving canoes, kayaks and Stand-Up Paddleboards (SUPs) can also be reported direct to British Canoeing using its own reporting system. This can be found at [Incident Reporting \(britishcanoeing.org.uk\)](https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk).

### **Provide support for inexperienced coaches**

A child had capsized in the middle of the waterway outside the rowing club and the coach on the bank was unable to manage the situation safely. The coach who is young and new to the club was encouraging the rower to get back in to the single for too long and at peak time in the vicinity of several barges and rowing boats. The coach did not inform the other crews that the child was in the water. When told to throw the throw line and pull the child towards the bank she proceeded to unravel the entire throw line and use the line end to throw to the child rather than the bag as designed. It was clear she was overwhelmed and unable to handle the situation safely.

Please do not expect too much of inexperienced coaches and support them as they gain knowledge and competence.

### **Do not shout at other coach's crews**

Last month I wrote about taking care to look after your own crew. There was another incident in May where a coach shouted at an 8 from another club in order to encourage them to change course as it was thought that a 1x that the coach was supporting was trying to pass. This seems unlikely. Please do not try to control crews from another club, particularly when their coach is present (as in this case), just stick to advising your own crews.

### **Take care when driving a launch**

A coach was driving a tiller steered launch that drifted while the coach was talking to the crew. The coach turned the launch as it set off again and accidentally turned a bit tightly while increasing the throttle. This pushed the engine around further, causing the throttle to increase further. This kicked the launch around faster and the coach fell in the water. The kill cord stopped the engine and the lifejacket inflated. Nearby coaches from other clubs rescued the coach.

Please take extra care when driving a launch, it may help to increase the resistance on the throttle and steering.

### **Do not wear loose clothing when rowing**

An experienced junior in a 1x was rowing downstream in choppy water with wind against tide and capsized. The crew of a passing 4x+ saw the capsize but could not see the rowers head or arms. The cox of the 4x+ entered the water and swam to the 1x to find that the rower's shorts were entangled with the rigger so that it was not possible to right the 1x.

Please take care not to wear loose fitting clothing when rowing.

### **Collision with a motorboat**

A 4x in the correct position in a channel collided with a motorboat that was on the wrong side of the waterway. The launch driver attempted corrective action at the last moment but ended up broadside to the 4x and was unable to avoid a collision. The bow ball went into the side of the launch, leaving a hole in the hull.



### **Take care to ensure that you know what is ahead**

An 8 moved out to the middle of the waterway to overtake a 1x and almost collided with a 4+ that was also in the middle of the river. The cox did not see the other boat at first as it was directly ahead.

Please take care to ensure that if a cox does not have a clear view forward, then the crew should reduce speed or the rower at bow should look ahead as if they were steering a coxless boat and warn the cox of any dangers.

In another incident a 2x collided with a stationary motor launch, which was setting buoys for a forthcoming regatta. Both crews believed themselves to be alone on the water and therefore neither were keeping a good look out.

Please take care to always keep a good lookout.

### **Take care to check heel restraints before going afloat**

A rower in a 1x capsized and the rower was seen to struggle to get out of the boat, flapping his arms and holding on to the boat. A coach, on the bank, tried to use a throw rope (too short) and waded in to assist. The athlete's feet came free as he got to the boat. Later, whilst washing the boat down, the coach found that one heel restraint string was missing and the other was untied.

In another Incident Report, a CRSA checked a boat before an outing noticed that one pair of shoes were different from the others and had both heel restraints lines present but undone and not threaded through shoe plate. Apparently, another crew had needed a pair of shoes and thought it was OK to remove a set of new shoes from a newly refurbished 4x and leave them with the restraints undone without telling anyone.

Please check your heel restraints before you need them.

### **Take care on land too**

A club uses wooden stands to support boats as they are being washed after each outing. As the crew carried their boat, a rower tripped over one of the stands and fell, and the boat landed on her shoulder. X-rays it showed that the rower had a cracked bone in their shoulder requiring their arm to be supported in a sling for six weeks followed by extended medical treatment of physio exercise until the muscle strength recovers.

In another incident when manoeuvring the 8 onto the trolley, a rower caught her lower leg on a sharp corner of the boat trestle. This caused them to suffer a five-inch shallow cut to their shin. The cut was cleaned with medical wipes and bandaged. The rower then went to A & E received a tetanus injection and a course of antibiotics.

## Take care before the start of a race

Two 4+s were doing practice starts on a bend in a crowded river, before the start of their races. One crew capsized and there were injuries to members of both crews and there was some equipment damage.

Take care when warming up before the start of a race.

## Be kind to animals too

A kitten had fallen into the water and had become marooned on a coot's nest. The bank here is 5 feet high. The kitten was wet and distressed as was the coot family.

A passing 4+ manoeuvred to within a few feet of the bank and coaxed the kitten onto the boat and thence to a section of bank where it was grabbed by a passer-by. The kitten ran off and the coot family able to reoccupy their nest.

In another incident, a seal decided to come and play close to a 1x, distracted the sculler who capsized.



## Launch Driving and Coaching

There have been incidents where coaches who were also driving launches had focused more attention on the crew that they were coaching than they did on keeping a good lookout and safely navigating their launch. This has caused collisions and other harmful incidents.

If you are driving a launch, then please remember that your primary responsibility is to do so safely. You must keep a good all-round lookout so that you are aware of your surroundings and others around you. If you are not capable of doing this and coaching, then find someone else to drive the launch. You will then be able to devote your attention to coaching your crew.

Launch drivers are expected to “Keep a good lookout at all times when afloat and warn other water users of any hazards or developing hazardous situations” (see [RowSafe 5.2 Launch Driving](#)).

There have even been some incidents where coaches were driving launches and simultaneously videoing their crew. This can be extremely dangerous.

There was a note in last month's report where a coach received an official reprimand from the navigation authority. The reprimand included the following: -

*“When navigating coaching launches in future, it is vital to remember that the primary responsibility of the helmsman should be on the navigation of their own vessel, and not upon coaching or accompanying rowing vessels. If your role requires you to be primarily focused upon coaching, then another helmsman should be sought who can focus upon the navigation of the vessel.”*

Please take care when driving launches.

## Waterborne diseases

There were many incidents of rowers being ill after being exposed to river water that they suspect of being contaminated or polluted.

- In April, a rower suffered nausea and vomiting for two days.
- In March, a rower had to take a day off work due to severe vomiting and a fever and had diarrhoea for seven days.
- In September 2022, a rower suffered a bee sting on their ankle. They later went swimming and their ankle became infected, so they went to A&E and were immediately put on antibiotics.
- In May, a rower suffered severe stomach cramps, which didn't last long, and then had to rush to the bathroom. About four fellow club members have had the same problem.
- In December 2022, a young rower was diagnosed with Cryptosporidium infection and suffered repeated diarrhoea. They lost 5kgs over the Christmas period.

There have also been emails about: -

- A junior who was infected through a blister and has been in hospital for three weeks.
- A rower who has been on an IV drip to treat an infection.
- A rower came down with a serious illness that may well have come from an infection due to dirty water getting into a cut on the rower's foot and resulting in the rower needing surgery.

It is possible that some of these illnesses had other causes but please take care to protect yourself from contaminated water. The advice in RowSafe is to: -

- Read and understand any information on waterborne infectious agents and contamination provided by the club.
- See their own doctor as soon as they think that they may have any relevant symptoms.
- Inform the club if they have contracted a disease associated with a waterborne cause so that others can be encouraged to take greater precautions.
- Cover all cuts or grazes with waterproof dressings if the water is contaminated.
- Wash or shower after any significant contact with water from the river, lake, canal or sea especially if they have any exposed cuts or grazes.
- Never drink water from sources such as rivers, lakes, canals or sea.
- Wash hands thoroughly before eating or drinking.
- Clean open wounds, such as blisters or calf abrasions with an anti-bacterial substance.
- If contaminated water has been swallowed, refer to their doctor with full details of the incident.

- Wear suitable footwear when launching or recovering a boat, particularly if it is necessary to wade into the water, to prevent direct contact with the water and protect the feet from cuts and abrasions.
- Hose down all equipment after outings to remove any potential contamination.
- Report incidents to the club and British Rowing ([British Rowing Incident Reporting](#)).

If you are suffering with any infection or stomach upset, then avoid strenuous exercise. Rowing is a team sport. Rowers should be encouraged to look after their fellow rowers. If they look unwell, then they should be asked how they feel and if there is concern, they should be encouraged to recover or to seek medical advice before they exercise. Please also take care not to transmit the infection to others.

## Drowning statistics

The national Water Safety Forum has issued the Water Incident Database (WAID) for 2022. This contains information about the causes of drownings in the UK and its constituent nations.

These data are available in an interactive report at [Interactive report | National Water Safety Forum](#) and in a more detailed report [here](#).

The report shows that: -

- There was a total of 597 drowning fatalities in the UK in 2022 of which 219 were suspected accidents and 212 were suspected suicides.
- Of the 226 accidental fatalities, 105 occurred during June, July and August and
  - 151 were in England
  - 45 in Scotland.
  - 22 in Wales and
  - 8 in Northern Ireland.
- Inland waters, such as rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs and quarries, continue to be the leading locations for accidental drowning, with 60% of deaths.
- Males continue to be over-represented, with 83% of accidental fatalities.
- Recreational activities accounted for 58% of accidental fatalities.

It is interesting to note that there were 9 fatalities associated with “manually powered boats”. It is believed that none of these involved members of British Rowing.



## Guidance on Coastal Rowing

Nancy Churchill of the Coastal Rowing Association of Western Australia Inc (a British Rowing Associated Organisation) has produced a planning and resource guide to Coastal Rowing.

This guide provides both a process and resources to help new and established clubs, as well as individuals, on their own journey towards safely taking up the exciting sport of coastal rowing. By adhering to best practices in management and safety, the guide focuses on introducing the sport in a way that engages, enthuses, and keeps safe those who wish to pursue it. The contents apply internationally and can be modified as needed to suit local circumstances.

The guide includes extensive advice on Coastal Rowing Safety and Risk Assessment. It is available from Amazon [here](#).

The association has also published a series of videos on coastal rowing self-rescue and buddy rescue. These are available on their YouTube channel at [Coastal Rowing WA - YouTube](#).



**COASTAL ROWING**  
Planning and Resource Guide



## Safety at Training Camps

There was some discussion about what responsibility a club would have for the safety of visiting clubs.

This is covered in section 3.5 of [RowSafe](#) on Training Camps and Rowing on Unfamiliar Waters, where the Expectations include: -

*Training Camp Organising Committees are expected to:*

- *Request safety information from the host club or venue management, this may include the venue's own Safety Rules and Navigation Plan. See the Safety Alert - [Know the river](#), especially when visiting new stretches of water.*
- *Request a Risk Assessment from the host club or venue management.*
- *Use this information to prepare a Training Camp Risk Assessment for the club's planned activities; this should include travel to and from the venue.*



## Look after Children in your care!

There was an incident in which two girls, aged 14 and 16, were training in a 2x. Two men, who appeared to be working on a car, shouted over to them as they rowed passed “hey cutie, over here”. The men then proceeded to perform sexually explicit hand gestures; the girls immediately rowed over to their coach to report what had happened. By then, the men were nowhere to be seen. The coach instructed the girls to get off the water, as they were clearly upset. The coach then phoned the police.

About 15min later a police car and van arrived.

The coach comforted the girls explaining they had done exactly the right thing. The coach also briefed the parents when they arrived at the club.

The club has subsequently made its safety boat drivers aware of the area where the incident occurred and asked them to be extra vigilant.

The club has sent a message to all its members to make them aware and advising them to report any further incidents to the Police, British Rowing (through the Incident Reporting system), and the Club Chairman and Welfare Officer. The Club Welfare Officer will also talk to the junior group.

Behaviour of this type that constitutes “intentional harassment, alarm or distress” is contrary to section 4A of the [Public Order Act 1986](#). It is also included in the [Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Bill](#). If passed into legislation this will result in the maximum penalty for behaviour of this type to being increased from six months to two years in prison if the behaviour was because of the relevant person’s sex (as in this case).

Fortunately, this reprehensible behaviour is not common but please be aware that it can happen. Be prepared for all foreseeable eventualities. Be aware that we are now approaching the season when anti-social behaviour becomes more common. If something like this happens where you row, then: -

- Take your rowers to a place of safety.
- Call the Police.
- Check that your rowers are not distressed, if necessary, talk to them calmly and reassure them that they are safe.
- Inform other coaches and rowers so that they can keep away from the area where the incident occurred.

If your rowers are children, then: -

- Inform their parents or carers.
- Continue to provide any reassurance and care that they need.
- Stay with them till they leave the club at the end of the session, as you normally would, but be extra attentive to their needs.

Also, take the actions taken by this club to share information (as described above). Do not identify the people directly impacted by the incident.

Please take care to support and protect each other.

## **Club Safety Policy**

There was a request for information on the contents of a club Safety Policy. The response was that there is a specimen Safety Policy in [RowSafe](#) on page 12, section 1.3.1.

## **Concussion Guidance**

There was a suggestion, in an email, that in the event of concussion a rower would have to make a gradual return to competition but could make an immediate return to training. This is not true.

It was explained that there will be discussions, on concussion, between medical experts soon and we should wait for the results of these before deciding whether we need to revise our guidance.

Concussion is not unknown in rowing, but it is not common. We have advice on Concussion in Safety Alerts. The Safety Alert on [Concussion](#) contains the Concussion Recognition Tool 5, this includes some information on not returning to sport until there has been a medical assessment. The Safety Alert on [Head Injuries](#) contains further information and includes the following:-

### ***Returning to sport***

*Exercising when suffering from concussion can make the condition worse. All sport should be avoided for 7 – 10 days or longer if the concussion is severe. Head injuries sustained outside rowing should be reported to the coach. If in any doubt seek healthcare professional advice and follow it.*

We are concerned about returning to sport (including training) rather than returning to competition. The same would apply if the concussion was suffered in another sport, return to rowing (or training) would still be covered by this guidance.