BRITISH ROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

September 2023

Stephen Worley

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Awards for Rowers

In the July report there was a summary of the Royal Humane Society awards that had been granted to rowers. This month I visited Cape Cornwall Gig Club in Sennen Cove to present three of these awards. These were to: -

- Simon Dean (Resuscitation Certificate),
- Blue Bell Hill (Certificate of Commendation) and
- Peter Trythall (Resuscitation Certificate)

This shows the award recipients, other members who helped and the casualty who has since made a good recovery and is now training for competition.

There is more information on the British Rowing website here.

Incidents in September

Coaches to the rescue

An 8, that was accompanied by a coaching launch, was rowing on an inland but tidal river. The coach in the launch saw a small inflatable tender, packed with a family of three children and two adults ahead of the 8 and warned the cox using a loud hailer. At the very last minute the tender changed course and accelerated across the bow of the 8. The 8 collided with the tender its bow punctured one of the tender's tubes. The tender remained afloat but was not "seaworthy". The coach rescued the passengers in the tender by taking them into his launch and carried them to safety. None of them had lifejackets. The driver of the tender was able to paddle the tender to safety.

Please take care to avoid collisions but if one does occur then please provide all the assistance that is needed.

In another incident, a coach was alerted by two double canoeists (K2s) who began shouting for help after spotting a man in the bank hanging onto a branch. The coach went to help and found the man to be barely conscious (minimally responsive). One of the canoeists entered the coaching launch to assist with the recovery of the man. The man was pulled into the launch and the emergency services were called (999).

They returned to the club and were met by the paramedic and one of the club members who had been a paramedic. They took the man inside into the warmth. At this point the emergency services arrived to help with the situation and take the man to the hospital. The police and fire services were involved due to the nature of the situation and were briefed and given a statement.

More anti-social behaviour

Following their return from a regatta, members of a rowing club were rigging their boats and ensuring everything was back in place. Suddenly, a young person, who along with others were trespassing at the time (this area was closed to the public), came into the boathouse, took two oars from the racks by the entrance and ran off. One of the members who was outside chased the youth who eventually thew the oars on the ground, while shouting verbal abuse to the member who was chasing them.

Members were reminded the guidelines from British Rowing on how to deal with antisocial behaviour and reported the incident to the police. Affected members were offered support, should they need it.

Please remember that if you do chase someone who has your property then it is probably best to stop chasing once you have your property back.

In another incident at a different club, a man who appeared to have been drinking entered a club uninvited and used the toilet. He was invited to leave and did so. The club has subsequently discussed the security of its premises.

Take care of your own mental health

Rowers in a 2x saw a human body floating in the water. The body looked "fresh" and was easily identified as a female, fully clothed, face down in the water. The 2x stopped and slowly approached the body. Once they had confirmed that it was a body then they rang 999 from the boat.

Both rowers were both very shocked and one began to panic and become anxious. The other rower provided reassurance and asked them to look away from the body.

The 2x remained with the body until the police arrived. This took about 15minutes. The police waited for a specialist team to recover the body. The police officer in charge asked the crew of the 2x to assist in preventing the body from going over the weir. The weir is about 150m from where they discovered the body.

Experiences like this can be extremely distressing. It was suggested to the crew of the 2x that it may help to talk about this with friends or family and, perhaps, the Club Welfare Officer. There is some guidance on the British Rowing website here. There is further information at the bottom of the page headed "Signposting". This page also contains information on Mental Health First Aid training.

People should not be afraid to ask for help. Your doctor may also be able to help or provide guidance on others who can.

The crew reported that they are both doing OK and have had lots of support from club members and friends.

The Regional Rowing Safety Adviser explained that the update on insurance cover for British Rowing members, includes mental health counselling following GP referral. There is further information here.

It is not usual to find dead bodies in the water, but this is not unheard of, and this is not the only recent occurrence. About 200 people commit suicide by drowning each year in the UK.

Training in Mental Health First Aid can also help to prevent suicide. This happened at a club in Yorkshire when a member noticed a person by the water acting strangely and simply went to talk to them. Training helps but simply getting into conversation may be all that is needed. Have a look at the videos here and here.

Do not waste time with "Fault" or "Blame"

There was a comment in an incident report that a collision was 'purely an accident' as no one party was to blame. Please try to avoid the concepts of fault and blame as they are not helpful; they just waste time and energy. There is nothing pure about incidents, particularly collisions, as they provide us with learning opportunities. It is important to learn everything we can from our incidents and for all the people involved to consider what they could have done differently to prevent the incident from occurring.

Take care not to be distracted

A beginner crew was waiting to launch from the hard when another crew on the land asked the coach to look at their speaker system. The bows of the boat on the water drifted out and continued to drift round until their boat was side on to the moored coaching launches. The boat then tipped upstream and swamped fully. The crew and cox were taken out of the boat onto the launches, then sent to change into dry clothing. The boat was removed from the water and emptied.

Please take care not to be distracted particularly when supervising inexperienced rowers. Other lessons learned were: -

- Remind the crew of the importance of the safe position.
- Remind the crew to react as soon as the conditions take control of the boat.
- Remind the Cox to use less people to manoeuvre, and to keep others sitting at safe position.

The crew and coach have sat down and talked through how they feel.

Take care when coming alongside

Rowers in a 2x were approaching the club pontoon when a gust of wind required them to push the boat back along the pontoon when they were still seated in the boat. One rower caught their hand in pontoon edge; this resulted in them breaking a bone in their hand and fainting.

Clubs should also check their pontoons, landing stages, etc. and ensure that the edges are in good condition and that there are no places where a rower could catch their hand.

Everyone should take care to keep a good look out

A coach driving a launch commendably reduced speed to reduce their wash as they passed a 1x going in the opposite direction. A few seconds later a 4x that was travelling in the same direction as the launch, hit the stern of the launch snapping their boats bow. This shows why it is important for everyone to keep a good look out and particularly for launch drivers to look astern before reducing speed.

In another incident an 8 set off from a stationary position and collided with the stern of a stationary 8 in front of it where the crew were doing drills. This collision could have been avoided if more care had been taken to keep a good lookout. The stroke of the stationary boat should have been well placed to see the boat approaching from astern.

In yet another incident an 8 moved out to avoid a 4x that had just pushed of from its club. The 8 moved unknowingly into the path of a 4 travelling in the opposite direction but one of the rowers in the 8 realised and shouted to warn the cox. The 8 then did an emergency stop and tried to tuck in, the oncoming four also stopped and manoeuvred around, avoiding collision. This is an example of good practice.

Take care to check launches

A launch driver attempted to reverse whilst crews had turned in front of the launch. The launch driver moved the gear stick into the reverse position however the launch drove forward at speed and collided with a 4x. The 4x suffered significant damage to the side of the hull and is unusable until repaired. The launch didn't restart and was taken out of service. Please ensure that launches are checked frequently. There is more information in the Safety Alert, Launch pre-use checks and the Safety Alert, Outboard Motor Safety Checks.

Take care of inexperienced rowers in 4xs and 8xs

An 8x contained a crew of Juniors with mixed abilities from experienced Juniors to recent beginners. One inexperienced rower caught a crab and lost control on the blade handle. It hit her two front teeth and gums causing some blood loss and damage to those teeth. The rower was taken out of the boat and returned to the club. Her mother was contacted she took the rower to hospital and to the dentist the following day and there was a dental repair. The club identified the need for new rowers to spend more time learning basic blade control skills before rowing in a 4x or 8x. Crew sculling boats move at considerable speed, so it is important to be able to extract the blade cleanly and neatly at the finish of each stroke.

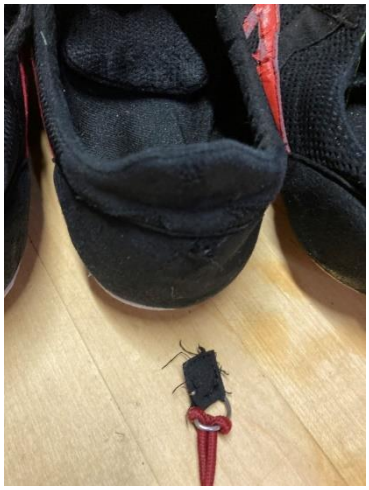
Take care to check your shoes before going afloat

A 2x capsized when one of its blades became entangled in weeds. One of the rower's feet had twisted within the shoe putting tension on the Velcro which did not then undo. The other rower swam round and, with difficulty, managed to free the foot on the third attempt. Fortunately, the trapped rower is tall and was keep their head was just above the water. The crew then righted and re-entered the boat. However, they thought that the presence of the backstay made this difficult and questioned the need for these in non-racing situations.

It was explained that the advice to fit backstays has nothing to do with whether the boat is racing or not. They are present to provide a degree of protection to rowers in the event of a head on collision. Head on collisions are more likely when training than they are at competitions.

It was later found that both heel restraints at this seat's shoes had been tied to the vertical support at the side of the foot-stretcher rather than the horizontal bottom strut. This explains one foot became stuck in the shoe. Remedial action was taken to retie the heel restraints to the bottom strut and the 'quick release' cords on the Velcro shoe fastening were shortened by 3 cm to allow for an easier release. Please take care to include these features in pre-launch checks.

Take care to check the heel restraint attachment on Win Tech shoes



In the August report there was information about the failure of heel restraint attachments to the heel of rowing shoes. It included this photograph.

Several similar failures were reported recently. Please take care to check this feature prior to each outing.

I have contacted Win Tech, via Oarsport, and am currently in discussion with them.

Take care tying your boat to your trailer

A 1x in its boat bag fell from the edge of the top rack of a trailer on the motorway. People in a car following the trailer said that the forward end of the boat came free of the trailer, the boat turned through 90° and became detached from the trailer. The boat was later recovered by the Police or Highways Agency.

Boat ties can work loose if there is any fore or aft movement of a tapered section of the boat. It is possible to add almost horizontal ties to prevent this, perhaps between a trailer arm and a stretcher. This could be difficult if the boat is in its bag.

A method of double tying the boat to a trailer is described in a video here. Using this method may well have prevented this incident.

Take extra care with swimmers

An 8 was rowing at steady pace, observing correct navigation when a flock of geese ahead took off to reveal a swimmer. The swimmer was moving very slowly while facing away from the boat, with no visibility aids. The crew stopped rowing and one side lifted their blades to avoid hitting the swimmer however the loom of bow's blade did hit the swimmer. The welfare of the swimmer was checked repeatedly, and assistance was offered several times. The swimmer made their way to the bank unaided.

Swimmers cad be difficult to see, and great care is needed to see and avoid them. Please take care as a collision with a swimmer can cause serious injury.

Take care when steering

There continue to be collisions where one or more crews crosses the centre of the waterway and has a head-on collision with another crew. This is particularly a problem near bends.

In one incident a 2x collided with a 4x, this resulted in bruising to the back of the bow person, and cuts on their leg as a blade of the 2x hit their back and then dragged over their leg.

Please take care to keep a good lookout and stay on the correct side of the waterway.

Be aware of safety issues off the water too.

A Club Rowing Safety Advisor (CRSA) reported seeing contractors working on riverside path using motorised stand on mini dumper trucks and a mini digger. One of the workers had his primary school age child with him (during the school holidays) and was allowing the child to manoeuvre a dumper truck into position for him to use a digger to fill it. The child was jerking the machine backwards and forwards because he could not use the controls properly, risking both himself and the club member volunteers who were waiting to fill their barrows next to the pile. The CRSA intervened and told the worker that his child could not use powered machinery on club premises. He readily agreed but continued to drive the machine with the child on the footplate in front of him.

The CRSA was advised that if anything like this happens again they then, if it is safe to do so, take photos and report the incident in an Incident report and to the Health and Safety Executive here.

Take care to quarantine boats that should not be used

A beginner master went afloat in a club 1x. This had been damaged the day before and was unserviceable. It had been labelled as such, but the label had either fallen off or been removed before. The rower says he checked the boat before going afloat and did not see the split in the hull. The boat gradually sank, and the rower was rescued by launches from another club.

Please take care to mark unserviceable boats in such a way that is robust and makes it clear that they should not be used. For example, tie a label to a rigger.

Competence of Launch Drivers

There was a discussion about the competence and qualification requirements of launch drivers following other advice to clubs following a request from a Boatman and Rowing Coach at a school that conducts its own tests for launch drivers

The current statement in RowSafe is in section 5.2.1, Launch Driving, this states: -

"Launch drivers are expected to:

• Be appropriately qualified and competent to drive a launch correctly in the conditions that are likely to be encountered. "

I believe that the reference to qualification should be removed as the competence requirements vary from venue to venue. If some form of qualification is needed, then clubs should be able to conduct their own tests and issue their own "qualifications" based on the skills needed to drive a launch at their venue. I wrote about this subject at some length in my Monthly Report of July this year under the heading of "*How does a club know that its launch drivers are competent?*"

What matters is that the launch drivers are competent to drive the launches that the club provides in the venue where the club rows and perform all the tasks that the club requires them to perform. I recommend that all clubs do what you do and provide support (training, tests, etc.) to ensure that its launch drivers can do this.

It may help if the club occasionally supervises its launch drivers to check that they continue to perform at this level. The incident caused by an RYA instructor described in my June report shows the need for continued refresher training and assessment. Some navigation authorities specify qualification requirements for drivers (usually RYA Level 2 Powerboat). There is no way to avoid this but, in some cases this may not be sufficient.

Rowing and Epilepsy

A rower wrote to ask for clarification on the British Rowing guidance on Rowing and Epilepsy. This contains the following: -

In line with the recommendations of the DVLA, this period of significant risk is defined as within one year following a seizure, and for six months whilst reducing medication or stopping medication. In these cases, where there is significant risk of further seizures, 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.

This was interpreted to mean that, to row, an individual must go a year without seizures on medication, and a further 6 months with no seizures without medication. This is not what was intended.

In fact, the guidance says that the "at risk" period is reduced from one year to six months if the rower is seizure free whilst reducing OR stopping medication. Also, it does not require the rower to have stopped medication. If the rower has been seizure free for a year even while taking medication, then they are able to row.

It has been explained to me that Epilepsy is a syndrome rather than a disease. It presents in many different forms in different people. We need to be able to accommodate the variety of experiences that different people have. It is for this reason that the guidance also mentions "a special individualised risk assessment of the individual and the event". "Event" in this context could also be described as the venue and circumstances in which the person rows.

In my view, much of this personalised risk assessment should be based on information from the rower's medical team on the probability of the rower having a seizure afloat and the type and severity of that seizure. The risk assessment may also include the steps that the rower, and their club, can take to minimise the harm that would result if the rower had such a seizure. This could include ensuring that they row in crew boats with people who are willing to support and assist them if needed.

Work with British Canoeing

Several Incident Reports that concern the interaction with kayakers were shared with the Safety Lead at British Canoeing.

Levels of Probability and Severity

There was a question about why we define five levels of probability and five levels of severity in our in the risk assessment templates when BS8800:2004 was said to define only three levels of each (actually it defines four levels of Probability). It also contains the note "*Organizations should adjust the design and size of the matrix to suit their needs*."

We prefer the 5 x 5 assessment method because the lesser detailed models are too coarse. It is important to keep in mind the vast range of both probability and severity in rowing. Severity goes from: -

Slight injury or health effect *(Requires little or no treatment; no need to take time off rowing or training)*	Minor injury or health effect *(Requires First Aid or rest; potentially a few days off rowing or training)*	Moderate injury or health effect *(Requires treatment beyond simple First Aid; potentially a week or so off rowing or training)*	Major injury or health effect *(Requires hospital treatment for more than one day; potentially a few weeks off rowing or training)*	Fatality or Life Threatening Injury or Health Effect *(could end a rowing career or cause hospitalisation for a few months)*
Minor damage to equipment *(<£100)*	Damage repair costs low *(£500)*	High damage repair costs *(>£1000)*	Very high damage repair costs *(loss of boat, 3rd party damage)*	Major damage & major costs *(loss of several boats, high 3rd party damage)*

Probability goes from: -

Highly improbable *(has not been known to happen in rowing)*	**Improbable** *(has been known to happen in rowing)*	**Possible** *(could happen to about 1% of the club's active members per decade)*	**Probable** (*could happen to about 1% of the club's active members per year)*	**Highly probable** *(could happen to about 10% of the club's active members per year)*

This simply reflects real life in rowing.

We wanted to give some indication about what would constitute each of the levels of severity and probability rather than leave it as "High", "Medium" and "Low". We wanted to add more objectivity; it helps if the user has something to calibrate their estimates. This pushed us to the 5 x 5 approach. Trying to do this in a 3 x 3 matrix would be both meaningless and unhelpful.

Support for a Rower who is Blind

I was asked about how a person who is blind can be supported to row and, in particular, what needs to be included in a risk assessment and does the student need to do a swimming test or a capsize drill?

The response was We are lucky that rowing is a sport in which people with disabilities can take part. It is often possible for them to take part alongside able-bodied rowers and to compete with them on a "level playing field". In some cases, we have to make adaptations to ensure that they can row safely. In the case of rowers with sensory impairments then we simply have to take a little more care.

We no longer have a requirement that rowers must be able to swim. Our guidance on Swimming and floating can be found in section 3.6 of RowSafe where it says:-

"Everyone taking part in rowing should be able to:

- *Float unaided for at least five minutes*

And ideally

- *Swim at least 50 metres in light clothing (rowing kit).*
- *Tread water for at least two minutes.*
- *Swim under water for at least five metres.*

Those rowers who can only float or swim when wearing a buoyancy aid should also wear such an aid, or a lifejacket if coxing, whenever they are afloat "

Clearly a person who is not able to see will need some help from the rowers around him or her. Providing these other rowers are willing and able to help then there should not be a problem. For this reason, it would be best if this rower rowed initially in a boat with several others (either a 4 or an 8).

There are some hazards at your venue that will be included in your risk assessment. The risk assessment should include additional hazards that the rower who cannot see would be exposed to and the additional Barriers and Controls that are needed to keep them safe.

The challenge we face is to be able to find ways in which people can row rather than to tell them that they cannot. This is not always easy, but it is worthwhile.

I copied this reply to a group of coaches who are involved with rowers with disabilities. They provided the following additional advice.

The primary adaptation that visual impairment requires is guidance. Otherwise, all other safety considerations to rowing are no different to any other rower.
There are several strategies to supporting Visually Impaired rowers depending on the resources available and the preferences of the rowers:

- *Support Rowing – Row in a double scull or pair with a sighted rower in bow to provide steering to the VI rower.*
- *Guide Rower – A rower in a single scull rowing beside/ahead of the VI rower to provide guidance.*
- *Guide Launch – A safety launch following the VI rower to provide guidance.*

Guide rowers and launch can communication by voice or by radio.

A draft of guidance for supporting rowers with a Visual Impairment was also provided.