



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

January 2024

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents in January

Please consider carrying a phone to call for help

A masters 4+ containing rowers aged 65+, was rowing back towards the club when a small steering error caused the boat to become entangled in bushes on the water's edge. The crew could not disentangle themselves and discovered they didn't have a phone to call for help. After about 30 minutes a working gravel barge happened to go by and recognised that they were in distress. The barge phoned the nearby marina who sent a boat out that was able to pull the boat out of the bushes.

At the same time a club launch came to investigate and arrived at the distressed boat two or three minutes after the marina boat. The club launch followed the boat towards the marina as it rowed back. The crew were severely chilled and had difficulty rowing in a coordinated fashion. The club launch had to tow them into the marina, and other members helped them to disembark, and put their boat away.

If there is network coverage where you row, then please consider carrying a phone in a waterproof case.

Please think about your lifejackets

There was an incident in which a coach fell from a launch into the water. The coach revved the launch engine a bit too hard and lost control of the tiller on the engine. The tiller moved to the side and made the launch spin on the spot. The coach stood up to try and grab the tiller, but the movement of the launch spinning threw him into the water. The kill cord worked, and the engine stopped. The coach could not climb back into the launch. The nearby rowing boats approached the coach and supported him in the water. The coach then inflated his manual lifejacket.

The cox of one of these boats alerted other coaches back at the club who used a launch to rescue the coach in the water. They took him back to the rowing club and then returned to retrieve the launch. The casualty was very cold and may have been suffering from hypothermia. He went to hospital and was cleared to go home a few hours later.

Please review the use of lifejackets by people in launches and consider using auto-inflation ones. There is further advice in the Safety Alert – Lifejackets here [Safety-Alert-February-2015-Lifejackets.pdf \(britishrowing.org\)](#)

Take care when in your launch

A launch crew suffered an unexpected sudden deflation of their RIB when afloat. The crew tried to reinflate the tubes, but their pump's piston had seized, and the pump handle broke. Water began to fill the rigid base at a rate quicker than they could bail out. The crew were lucky to be rescued by a passing Environmental Agency Fisheries Patrol Craft. It may have been safer to take the launch to a place of safety (e.g. the riverbank) as soon as they noticed the defect try to repair it there. At least the crew would then have been safe.

Look for alternatives.

There was a report complaining about the lack of hot water for showers due to the water supply from the meter being through an above ground water pipe. The complainant suggested that the pipe should be buried to the correct depth. It was suggested that the club should consider trace heating (simply Google “Trace Heating”) and insulation as this may be more cost effective. Trace heating simply consists of clipping a proprietary electrically insulated heating element wire to the pipe and supplying this through a thermostat. It would also be necessary to have thermal pipe insulation around the pipe and the heating element.

Please take care when you sit down

An 8 recently suffered a bent fin and rudder then the crew sat down in the boat at the water’s edge when there was not sufficient clearance between the fin and rudder and the riverbed. The weight of the crew caused the boat to move downwards causing the damage. The crew subsequently had difficulty steering and caused some inconvenience to other crews in the head race. Please encourage your crews to check the clearance before getting into their boats particularly if they are boating from an unfamiliar venue.

Please take care with hatch covers

The purpose of hatch covers is to seal the hatch so that in the event of a boat being swamped or sinking the hull retains sufficient buoyancy to support the crew. Proper hatch covers are needed to retain the pressure under the hatch. One boat was reported to have duct tape in place of a proper hatch cover. This is clearly not acceptable. Please check that your boats use the correct hatch covers and that they are correctly fitted.



Take care on icy surfaces

A rower slipped on an icy pontoon when carrying a boat and one person fell into the water. Please wear appropriate footwear and take care.

Please take care when leaving boats on trestles

An 8 was left on trestles in between divisions of a head race. A gust of wind then blew the boat off the trestles onto the ground, resulting in damage to the entire length of the hull and a snapped fin. The Regional Rowing Safety Adviser subsequently commented recommending that if boats are left on trestles, then they should be upside down so that they are more stable and if they fall, they land on the riggers, which are less likely to suffer damage than the hull.

Boats will drift in the stream and crews may not be able to respond quickly

An experienced junior 8 drifted downstream towards an island. The crew eased and the coach instructed them to turn the boat, but they responded too slowly, and the boat was swept onto the island. The boat came to rest in a stable position but pushed onto the island. The crew was instructed to get out onto the island without entering the water. They were taken to safety in the launches and the boat was recovered later.

The learning points were: -

1. Do not underestimate the distance a boat can drift in the time it takes to turn.
2. Do not overestimate the ability of a crew to turn a boat.

Take care of your boats

An experienced senior crew left their launch pulled up onto the embankment while they tended to some other matters. The tide was on the flood and the rise of water level caused the launch to be floated off the embankment and was swept away. The launch was retrieved by the RNLI.

In another incident the people holding a 4x+ let go and the boat drifted quickly downriver. The Boat came to rest against wall, a throwline was attached and the boat was towed back using stable 1x and a kayak.

Take care to look ahead more frequently

A rigger on a 4x hit the engine of a stationary, or slow moving, launch, both being on the correct side of the river. The steers of the 4x had looked ahead before they started a set of ten power strokes but did not see anything. A comment was added that this collision could have been avoided by keeping a better lookout. A boat will travel a long way in ten power strokes so a more frequent lookout ahead would be appropriate. It would also help if the launch driver looked astern more often.

In another incident a rower in a 1x reported that they were “day dreaming” when rowing and assumed that they were rowing straight and rowed into some reeds. The rower did not capsize and was able to back down out of the reeds unaided.

Please be careful what you write

The purpose of the Incident Reporting system is to learn from incidents and to share that learning to prevent a recurrence. It does not really matter who did what. What does matter is that we understand what happened and have some understanding of why it happened. Please try to avoid any thoughts about fault, blame and guilt; they have no place in Incident Reports.

Please take care to avoid profanities and swear words in Incident Reports. In one report the words used by someone afloat were quoted *verbatim*. In this case this was not appropriate. British Rowing has rules on abusive language incorporated into the [Codes of Conduct](#). I edited this report to remove the swear words.

Please also take care to avoid including people's names particularly those of Juniors. Only use names if you would like to praise or thank someone.

[This report contains safety guidance. Please read our safety message and disclaimer.](#)

Getting it right

It is very pleasing to read reports that describe actions that were taken correctly, and which were effective. One incident describes the capsizing of a 4x+ that became unstable as it was turning and the whole crew let go of their blades. The boat was being coached from a powerboat, and two other powerboats, were in the vicinity. All the rowers climbed on top of the boat and waited for their turn to be put onto a power boat. The rowers were on the boat for a matter of minutes before being taken back to the club.

All rowers had a change of clothes in case of a capsizing. All of the crew were issued a first-aid blanket as soon as they were taken from the water and put onto the launch. All the crew returned to the boathouse put in a warm shower with their clothes on and gently warmed up before getting into their dry warm clothes. The whole crew was then given a warm drink to warm them. The boat was left and later recovered by two of the coaches.

High river levels and flooding

The UK has recently suffered from unseasonably high rainfalls and many rivers are swollen and fast flowing. There are floods in many areas. The Environment Agency has seen an increase in boats coming adrift from their moorings and issued the following two posts

1. [Environment AgencySE on X: "Boaters, an increased number of boats have come adrift. This can impact you with the loss of your boat and could cause flood risk if a boat blocks a weir. If safe, please check your mooring. If your boat comes adrift report it to us 24/7 on 0800 807060. #RespectTheWater https://t.co/HD4ValB7UF" / X \(twitter.com\)](#)
2. [Environment AgencySE on X: "Boaters, if safe to do so, please check that your boats are securely moored and adjust mooring lines if appropriate, as there are very high river flows and more rain coming. Check local river conditions and closures here: https://t.co/8KWNsKkagX #RespectTheWater https://t.co/SOhvz7euCv" / X \(twitter.com\)](#)

There is another problem. The recent heavy rain could also cause problems to open launches where rainwater could collect. This will cause them to become heavy and float low in the water. On rivers, floating low in the water tends to increase the drag on the boat (and therefore the load on the moorings). In all locations, it tends to make the boat unstable and will increase the risk of swamping if the water is rough.

If your club keeps its launch(es) afloat, perhaps on moorings or tethered to a pontoon then please check it, particularly if it has not been used in recent weeks. Check the security of its moorings and check the water level within the launch.

Tide and stream information for rowers on the Tidal Thames

Last month I mentioned that my colleagues at British Rowing HQ have developed a webpage providing information on tide times and Ebb Tide Flag Status. This can be found [here](#). Information on tide times has been added to this page. If you row on the Tidal Thames, then please bookmark the page.

Protective blankets for people who are rescued from the water

In previous months I have advised against the use of foil blankets for people who are rescued in favour of something more substantial and less flimsy. Someone asked what the RNLI use. The response from colleagues at the RNLI was that they use two types.

The best ones are officially called a disrobe pack like this: -

<https://www.respirex.com/en/products/pre-decontamination-modesty-pack>

they have a fleece like lining that absorbs water off the casualty.

There is a more widely available version that is foil lined, it is a heavy duty waterproof poncho. There is more information [here](#)



Professional Indemnity Insurance for Safety Advisers

There was some discussion about Professional Indemnity Insurance. This cover extends to:

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- British Rowing individually registered members (including officials),
- volunteers whether members or not,
- coach educators (coach to coach), tutors, assessors, and verifiers and
- coaches who are individually registered members of British Rowing.

Safety Advisers would be regarded as volunteers. The limit of indemnity is £5,000,000 each and every claim or loss, excluding defence costs.

RowSafe Updates

RowSafe is updated each year in April. If you have any suggestions for items to be added, expanded, clarified, reduced or removed then please let me know at safety@britishrowing.org.

Appointment of a Safety Adviser for British Rowing events

British Rowing is looking to appoint a volunteer Safety Adviser to cover all three of the British Rowing competitions that take place at the National Water Sports Centre from 2024 onwards. There is further information here [British Rowing Championships - Safety Adviser \(Volunteer\) - British Rowing](#).

Work with the Cornish Pilot Gig Association (CPGA)

Advice was provided on the need for lights, and the types of lights needed on gigs following some problems in a commercial harbour. This was copied to the CPGA Rowing Safety Adviser who forwarded it to the relevant club.

Safety at Head Races

A detailed description of the failures at a recent head race were provided. These included: -

- having to wait at the start for 30-60 minutes awaiting the arrival of inconsiderate crews
- Crews boating 10-15 minutes after the start time of their division
- Crews paddling up to the start in pairs.
- The local eight paddled to the start, 20 minutes after the start time, with no sense of urgency, in the certain knowledge that they would not be penalised and that when they got to the start they would turn around and start immediately.
- For Division 3 the pontoons were completely empty 20 minutes before start time and did not get busy until about 5 minutes before start time. This meant that division 4 could not start boating until after the start time as division 3 were coming off the water.
- Division 4 started the same way. No-one wanting to go afloat as they knew if they did they would be waiting at the start.

My response was that some time ago I wrote a Safety Alert on [Not Getting Cold at Heads](#) It contained the following: -

Event Organisers can help by:

- *Scheduling races so as to minimise the time spent waiting*
- *Ensuring that races and divisions start at the right time*
- *Marshalling crews to get afloat and clear the launch area quickly*
- *Encouraging crews to go afloat at the right time so that they do not have to wait*

It also contained information about dressing to keep warm when waiting.

In my view if competitors are told that races will always start at the advertised time, whether the competitors are present or not, and this actually happens then the effect will be quite magical. Word will get around very quickly and everyone will comply.

I am tempted to say that there is no need to advise crews when to go afloat, it is up to them, and their coaches, to work that out. This level of self-organisation is all part of what it means to compete. This may vary a bit from competition to competition depending on the need for sequencing if there is limited room beyond or before the start.

There may be merit in giving crews going afloat priority over those coming ashore.

There will need to be a strict, and well marshalled, queuing system when going afloat. Crews that are late should not be allowed to jump the queue.

Analysis of Incident Reports

Thank-you for all the Incident Reports that you and your clubs have submitted. The reporting of incidents is an important way in which we can all contribute to Rowing Safety. Knowing about the incidents that happen helps us to target our advice and guidance where it is needed. Incident Reports give us an opportunity to learn from the experience of others and sharing this learning helps us to drive improvements in Rowing Safety.

We usually publish an analysis of the previous year's incident reports at this time. However, the software supporting the Incident Reporting system has not been reliable and some of the information has been compromised. It is also difficult to extract complete information from the system. For these reasons it has been decided not to try to complete the analysis of 2023 incidents. It is hoped that new software will be introduced soon.

It is, however, possible to extract some information from the data. The following clubs each submitted the highest number of reports.

Club	Number of reports
Lea RC	72
Marlow RC	47
Kingston RC	43
City of Bristol Rowing Club	42
Bristol Ariel RC	39
Maidenhead RC	39
Norwich Rowing Club	34
Leicester RC	33
York City RC	33
Avon County RC	30
Bewl Bridge RC	30
Latymer Upper School BC	30

Information on the number of reports from each club in their region will be provided to Regional Rowing Safety Advisers.

British Rowing has 137 clubs with 100 members or more, of these 124 clubs reported one or more incident in 2023 and 13 (9%) did not report any incidents. I have written to these 13 clubs to explain that all clubs have incidents, the importance of Incident Reporting, and British Rowing's expectation clubs report their incidents. So far, I have had positive responses from seven of those clubs.