



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

February 2024

Stephen Worley

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents in February

Take care when the water levels are high

The water levels in the river were high due to the recent rain. The crew of a 2x were sitting in their boat only to find, as they were pushing off, that the stern of the boat had drifted back over the landing stage. This caused the fin to catch on the landing stage and to be damaged as the crew pushed off.

Please take extra care when water levels are higher than usual and do not forget that boats go down in the water when the crew transfers their weight into them.

The other problem with high water levels on inland rivers is that they can cause debris that has become lodged on the riverbanks to float and become a hazard to navigation. During one evening outing an 8 became lodged on top of a floating tree. The crew managed to push the tree towards the bows and free themselves from the tree.

In another incident, a landing stage had been partially submerged for several weeks following recent rise in lake level. Algae had grown on its wooden planks and it had become very slippery. A coach wearing Wellington boots was inspecting the landing stage and slipped and fell. Access to the submerged section of landing stage has since been avoided

Slippery when wet

A 2- was dropped when it was being handled ashore while it and the crew were in the queue waiting to launch. The boat was wet and had become slippery. The boat hit the ground causing a large crack across the hull.

In another incident the members of the crew of a 2x were standing too close together, and not paying sufficient attention when carrying a boat. This caused the stern of the boat, including the rudder pintle to hit the concrete slipway and the rudder became jammed during the subsequent outing.



Please take care when handling boats ashore particularly when they are wet and slippery.

Larger boats capsize too

It is often assumed that larger boats, being more stable than smaller boats, do not capsize. This is a false assumption.

A 4x+ was swept by a strong stream under the overhanging branches of a tree. This caused a crew to panic and several crew members let go of their handles and the boat capsized. The subsequent actions were exemplary. The coach instructed the crew to climb on top of their inverted boat from where it was easy to collect them with the launch. They were taken back to the boathouse without delay and the boat was subsequently recovered.

In yet another incident a 4x+ capsized when doing single strokes. Several blades were not fully squared at the catch. All crew members held on to the boat and were recovered into the launch.

Learn to obey the rules, they are there for a reason

Two 4x+s were involved in a head race and were approaching the no-overtaking zone around a bridge. One crew was trying to overtake the other. The overtaking crew ignored the instructions of the Marshall and continued its attempt to overtake. This caused the other crew to steer into the bridge, which in turn made them let go of their port side sculls and the boat capsized.

The 5 following crews had to be temporarily stopped to allow the capsized crew to be moved safely to the bank. The overtaking crew was disqualified.

Would you know what to do?

A rower lost consciousness and slumped from the ergometer to the floor with feet still strapped in during an indoor rowing session. The other rowers quickly removed them from the ergometer and placed them in the recovery position. One of the rowers is a qualified nurse and another is the Club first aider. The rower did not require resuscitation and remained under observation until they regained consciousness, and their breathing and heartrate had returned to normal.

The rower subsequently reported that they had recently contracted COVID-19 and had returned to exercise approximately 10 days previously. No indication was given as to the period between diagnosis and the return to exercise. Please take care with return to exercise following any illness. There is advice on returning to exercise following Covid in the Safety Alert [here](#).

There is First Aid advice on how to conduct a Primary Survey [here](#) and how to put someone into the Recovery Position [here](#).

Take care to protect yourself from contaminated water

A junior rower in a 1x capsized. The rower came in straight away, and after showering was dry and warm and still smiling. Unfortunately the rower has since developed a bacterial infection and is being treated with antibiotics and anti-sickness medication.

In another incident a rower's face, mouth and eyes were splashed with river water. They washed and showered with clean water but subsequently became ill with nausea, diarrhoea and abdominal pain.

In another incident a rower reportedly contracted Cellulitis and needed treatment with antibiotics and an overnight stay in hospital. Cellulitis is a skin infection that is treated with antibiotics. It can be serious if it's not treated quickly. It makes the skin painful, hot and swollen. The infected area usually looks red, but this may be less obvious on brown or black skin. There is more information here [Cellulitis - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk).

Know when to stop

The steering of an 8 was damaged by debris but the cox thought that it would be possible to "steer by pressure". However, this did not work particularly well and the crew hit the branches of an overhanging tree.

Always keep a good lookout

There was a collision between a 1x and a 2x in which the rower in the 1x assumed that the river ahead was clear because he had not heard a warning shout. The response was to encourage the rower to understand that everyone has a responsibility to keep a good lookout and avoid collisions. Simply put, if you cannot see where you are going then you must stop. If your view is in some way restricted, then you must reduce speed. You cannot expect others to give audible warnings and you certainly cannot rely on them doing so. If they do, then that is very helpful.

Sometimes the view ahead is restricted by the sun. Some people wear caps or sunglasses and find that this help. We do have these incidents but that does not make them inevitable or excusable. They can and should be avoided.

In another incident in which a 4x was overtaking and nearly collided with an oncoming crew. The oncoming crew complained that there was no verbal warning.

Please do not rely on shouted warnings. These sometimes do not happen and sometimes they do but they are not heard or not understood. It is always imperative to keep a good lookout, even more so when overtaking.

In yet another incident a 2x and a 1x collided head on due to poor lookout by both crews. The 1x capsized and the rower climbed onto their boat and was rescued by a launch. The bow rower in the 2x was hit on the back causing significant spinal bruising.

In a further incident there was a head on collision between a 4x and a 2x at a bend in the river. The bend restricted the view ahead for both crews but both had strayed into the middle of the river.

Take care of your launch

The gear lever on a launch failed when the launch was in a strong stream. The launch was swept towards a moored boat and it capsized. The driver stopped the motor by removing the kill cord. The driver had an auto inflation lifejacket that had inflated and a radio. The driver stayed calm and climbed on top of the inverted launch and was subsequently rescued.

Please take care to ensure that your launches are well maintained.

Take care near weirs

A 4+ was swept towards a weir by the flow onto the safety pylon. The crew extracted themselves safely from their situation. Weirs are always dangerous, please take care to keep well clear.

RowSafe Updates

There was a suggestion that information on VHF Marine Mobile Band Radion Licensing Requirements and Legionnaires Disease are included in RowSafe. It is not appropriate to do so because neither are related to rowing safety. They are however included in the Guidance on Safety in Club Premises here [Safety in Club Premises - British Rowing](#). This guidance concerns the legal safety requirements for clubs. In general, safety law does not apply to the "field of play", but it does apply to the extent that clubs have employees and to the extent that they are in control of premises.

This guideline includes information on: -

1. Work at height
2. Fire arrangements
3. Safety of electrical equipment and installations
4. Gas safety including LPG and LNG
5. Hazardous chemicals
6. Storage of petrol
7. Asbestos in the building structure
8. Lifting equipment
9. Avoidance of slips, trips and falls
10. Legionnaires' disease
11. Food safety and
12. Radio licensing

Where appropriate, links to this Guideline will be incorporated into RowSafe.

Radio licensing is not a safety matter so should not be in RowSafe, radio operating technique (for any type of radio) can and does impact on safety so that should be in RowSafe.

There was also a suggestion that the guidance on CPR and AEDs should state that these should only be used on land. The response was that there is already a massive amount of information on CPR and AEDs in Section 8.7 "What to do if someone collapses in a boat" and some more in section 9.4 "Indoor Rowing". One of the problems is that real life is nuanced, it is not as simple. A member of a Cornish Pilot Gig crew recently successfully delivered CPR to a fellow crew member when afloat at sea. As far as AEDs are concerned then, if there is only one, it should be at a known place ashore and if it is needed then the crew of the boat containing the casualty should take the casualty to the AED as fast as they can. Marshalls and others should clear the way for them. Collapses tend to occur at the end of races so this is not as difficult as it sounds. There is further information in the Safety Alerts on What to do if a rower collapses in a boat [here](#), and AEDs [here](#).

The statement "do not try to deliver CPR in a lightweight rowing boat" will be added to RowSafe.

Lifejackets for coxes in an offshore coastal 4x+

There was a request for advice on the type of lifejacket that should be used by offshore coxes. There was concern that a conventional auto-inflation lifejacket could be inflated when not needed by being splashed so that a manual inflation one may be preferred.

It was explained that there is a third option that is worth considering. As well as manual actuation lifejackets, there are two types of auto inflation lifejackets. The most often used is based on a paper disk or dissolving pellet; this simply responds to being wet and splashes, with sufficient volume, can cause it to actuate. The other type is pressure sensitive (or hydrostatic), this is actuated by the water pressure when immersed, it only needs to be a few centimetres under water. These may be more appropriate for offshore coxes. All auto-inflation lifejackets can also be inflated manually.

There is more detailed advice on the RNLI website. Go to [Lifejackets And Buoyancy Aids - Choose And Maintain Yours \(rnli.org\)](#), scroll down and then click on "Manual or Automatic" as shown below, then scroll down a bit more.

Why don't rowers wear lifejackets?

Someone who witnessed the capsizing of a school 4x wrote and expressed concern that the rowers were not wearing lifejackets. I wrote at length about this in my [Monthly Report of June 2019](#) and included an extract from that report. Anyone interested in the answer is invited to follow the link and read that report.

Guidance on Risk Assessment

There was a request for advice on

- a) assessing risks relating to river conditions
- b) assessing competence of individuals and crews and
- c) establishing the required level of competence to mitigate a given river condition risk.

The response is: -

- a) There is training on Risk Assessment in RowHow at [Safety Basics](#) and [Advanced Risk Assessment](#). The risk assessment protocol includes assessing risk due to the Water and due to the weather. There was some concern about red boards and flags. There is further Advice in the Safety Alert on Red Flags [here](#). These are intended as advice to river users. This is made clear on the Environment Agency website [here](#). It is not the same as a river closure or a navigation restriction. It is up to the club to take this information into account when determining whether, or not, it is safe to continue to do what it plans to do with the people and crew involved.
- b) Assessing the competence of crews involves considering their level of capability, strength, endurance, strength, skill and discipline.
- c) The required level of capability depends on the conditions prevailing at the time.

How does the EA flag system apply to Venetian Rowing Boats?

There was a request for advice on the applicability of this warning system to Venetian rowing boats in the UK. There is more information on this type of boat and this style of rowing [here](#).

The response was that I have two concerns, the first is the speed of these boats and whether they can make headway against a strong stream. It may be that they would have difficulties even if the EA was not displaying red or amber boards/flags. The second concern is the way these flat bottomed boats would be affected by winds, particularly cross winds. Wind strength is not included in the EA flag system.

Pre-outing risk assessments should take both of these factors into account together with the strength, experience and capability of the crew and any other factors that the club feels to be relevant.

Types of Launches

There was concern expressed about the advice in RowSafe about the different types of launches and their suitability in assisting rowers in need of help. There was particular concern about the stability of catamaran launches.

The response was that we must be careful to give advice that clubs and others can work with. Clubs and competitions are not going to buy new launches just because their current ones are not ideal. In real life whatever boat is present, if well handled, can be used to help. Help does not necessarily mean pulling people out of the water. If rowers do what they are trained to do and climb onto their inverted boats when they capsize then it is easy to transfer them into a launch.

Even unstable launches have their uses. They can be used to keep a rowing boat stable while the crew climb in or onto it. Coaches can tell rowers to hold onto their boat while the launch tows both to a place of safety.

Capsize statistics for larger boats

I was asked for statistics relating to 4s and 8s. Unfortunately, we do not have these measures but I estimate that there are about 20 capsizes of various types of 4s each year and about five capsizes of 8s.

Belt mounted inflatable buoyancy aids

I was asked about the efficacy of a belt mounted inflatable floatation device that deployed into the shape of a horse-shoe life ring. I replied that these are not suitable for rowers but that there were belt mounted floatation devices that deploy into the shape of a small lifejacket. These are much more likely to be effective. One such device can be found [here](#).

Rowing at Night

There was a request for advice on this topic alongside the statement that “British Rowing don’t recommend it”. In fact, British Rowing neither recommend nor discourage rowing at night, this is a matter for each club to use its risk assessment to determine the conditions when rowing in the dark can or cannot happen.

Many clubs row at night in darkness. They need to take extra care to make this safe (low risk) and it may not be as safe as rowing in daylight. The obvious hazard is that it is dark and unlit objects are difficult to see. It may depend on the level of ambient light from street lights, etc.

A club’s rowing in darkness risk assessment should also take account of the known hazards. If, for example, there is a weir and this is this well enough lit so that rowers can avoid getting anywhere near it then rowing may be permitted. This risk assessment should help to define rules to ensure that rowers are not exposed to excessive risk. There is a little guidance on this in section 9.1 of RowSafe (page 131).

In the club rules section of RowSafe (3.2) it says "Club rules should include..

.....

- Rules relating to rowing in darkness, particularly for boats without coxes. "

Cold Water Rowing Guidance

There was a request for information on the location of guidance on this subject. We have a cold water and hypothermia course [here](#) and we have a Safety Alert on Cold Water Kills [here](#). There are also lots of videos on the subject on YouTube. Any that feature Professor Mike Tipton (such as this one [Professor Mike Tipton on Cold Water Shock \(youtube.com\)](#)) are worth watching.

Training for Club Rowing Safety Advisers

There has been some discussion of training for CRSAs. There is a job description for CRSAs in section 3.4 of [RowSafe](#), this includes an expectation that CRSAs complete the [Advanced Risk Assessment](#) Training in RowHow. It should be easy to provide any further training needed.

The need for long hair to be tied up

A coach wrote to say that they were just telling one of the girls she needs to tie her hair up citing the Irish quad incident. Did we ever hear how the girl most badly affected ended up?

Amy Mulcahy suffered serious life changing brain damage. A quick internet search revealed that the latest news is from 2021. There are two relevant articles [here](#) and [here](#). These show that she has recovered to an extent but that the recovery has not been miraculous.

Support for the CPGA

Information about a collision between a rowing boat and a pilot gig was provided to the CPGA Safety Adviser.

The Harbourmaster of a harbour that hosts a gig club wrote to explain that there had been concerns that the gig club were rowing near the harbour mouth and not using lights at times when lights were needed. There was some subsequent discussion and the club fitted lights to their boats.



There was a request for advice from a CPGA club who are often asked to host visiting gig rowers. The response was that I suspect that it is quite normal for gig rowers on holiday or visiting another area to row with the local gig club. Many gig clubs are located in very popular and picturesque areas. I have not heard of any problems.

One potential issue is the medical fitness of the visitor. Last year I had an outing with Cape Cornwall Gig Club in Sennen Cove; it is a beautiful place and a very friendly club. I provided some medical information to the club secretary, who is a retired doctor. The club has forms and procedures for this. I am sure that if you ask him then the secretary will share them with you.

All members of British Rowing have personal injury insurance and member to member insurance as part of their membership. This covers them during all rowing related activities including travel. It is possible that the CPGA has something similar. This reply was copied to the CPGA Safety Adviser.