



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

October 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Rowers rewarded for their Bravery

In April, Duncan Strachan and Mary Lack entered the water and saved the life of an unknown man who had jumped from a bridge in Warwick. The rescue is described in my reports here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-April-2025.pdf](#) and [HRSA-Monthly-Report-July-2025.pdf](#).



The photo shows Duncan and Mary being presented with their Royal Humane Society Testimonials on Parchment by Gary Harris, the former Deputy Chair of British Rowing. Gary kindly offered to present these awards at the Warwick Boat Club Annual Dinner as I was abroad on holiday.

There is more information here [Mary Lack and Duncan Strachan awarded Royal Humane Society Testimonial for bravery - British Rowing](#).

Incidents Reported in October

Take care with your lights

As we move into the winter, it will become increasingly common for morning and evening outings to take place when it is dark. Please take care to ensure that boats afloat when it is dark have the lights required by the Navigation Authority and that these lights are correctly fitted and in good working order. It is also important to keep a good lookout for lights on other boats. Please see the [Safety-Alert-Lights-on-Rowing-Boats.pdf](#).

Please consider whether it is safe for some or all of your boats and members to be afloat in darkness. There is an expectation in RowSafe that Clubs will “*Produce and communicate Safety Plans and Safety Rules for all its members and coaches*”, based, in part, on its Risk Assessment, and “*Safety Rules could include Rules relating to rowing in darkness, particularly for boats without coxes.*”

There were some incidents in October where lights were not as effective as they should have been.

- In one incident an 8+ rounded a corner and positioned itself, close to the bank, to row along a straight. Another 8+ appeared, rowing in the opposite direction, in the centre of the river. The first 8+ moved closer to the bank and stopped. The other 8+ stayed in the centre of river and was warned by coaches on the bank but was slow to reduce its speed or change course. There was a near miss and collision was avoided.
- There was a collision between a 4x and a 2x in darkness, in a narrow area under a bridge. Both boats had lights and were using high visibility jackets and both crews stopped rowing just before collision. Both crews could have kept a better lookout.
- A rower in a 1x took a corner on the wrong side of the river, resulting in a collision with a 2x that was on the correct side of the river. Both crews could have kept a better lookout.
- In another incident, two launches from the same club were spotted without sufficient lighting, in low light conditions. The launches were accompanying six 1xs, which were all well-lit.
- The bow rowers in two 2xs were wearing head torches strapped to the back of heads in darkness. These were not visible to oncoming crews as these rowers were turning their heads and looking behind. Both crews performed an emergency stop to avoid a collision.
- There was a collision between an 8+ and a 4+ in darkness although both boats had lights on bow and stern. The 4+ was on the correct side of the river and the 8+ pushed off from its landing stage about 50m in front of the 4+. It was only seen when the boats were about 10-15m apart. Both crews held it up, taking most of the momentum out of the collision. The light was knocked off the bow of the 8+ and was retrieved.

Rower badly injured by wash

Two rowers were about to launch their 2x when the wash from a passing private pleasure cruiser arrived at the beach. The wash was at a level that the crew had never experienced before; they noticed that the drag of water before the waves hit was exceptionally strong. They dealt with the first wave, but their boat was then sucked out and thrown back against them, and the legs of both of them were badly hit. This was repeated seconds later when the next wave arrived.

One of the rowers was badly injured and the Ambulance, Fire and RNLI attended within 15 minutes. The rower was taken to hospital; an MRI scan revealed a fractured tibia which requires surgery. The rower was admitted hospital. This incident was reported to the Navigation Authority, and it is understood that an investigation is in progress.

In another incident three motorised cruise boats were travelling in a line upstream at excessive speed causing extreme wash and impacting on three 1xs. The 1xs were partially swamped but could be rowed back to their club. They were accompanied by a Navigation Authority launch.

Take care with wash

A coaching launch caused issues by approaching a rowing boat at speed on the wrong side of the river around a blind corner. This occurred at dusk; the rowing boat had the correct lights, but the launch was unlit. The wash from the launch was beyond the limits of what was safe, but a collision was averted.

There was a complaint from the occupant of a small barge that the wash from a coaching launch had passed unnecessarily close to their vessel, and the wash caused their child to fall to ground within the vessel. Launch drivers have been briefed to operate at low speed near other craft. Wash awareness will be included in periodic launch driver refresher training.

In recent months there have been many incidents and complaints involving wash from launches. There have even been suggestions that coaching launches should be banned from some areas at some times. A Safety Alert has been issued on Wash from Launches; this can be found at [Safety-Alert-Consider-your-wash.pdf](#) and a copy will accompany this report.

Please take care of your boats.

Boats were strapped securely to trailer and checked. They were checked again after they had travelled for about one mile. After a further 10 miles, one of the straps on a 1x failed, the boat fell off the trailer and was damaged beyond repair. The club was using a new type of strap that they will not use again.

In another incident an unattended 4x was blown off trestles and damaged. Please take care of your boats.

Keep Clear of Dove Pier and other, similar hazards

There were several incidents where boats were swept into obstructions, including Dove Pier on the Tideway.

- The crew of a 4x+ eased on the upstream side of Dove Pier contrary to their coach's instructions. They then drifted onto one of the moored boats, pulled in their oars on one side and capsized. The rowers mounted their upturned shell and waited for assistance. They were rescued by two coaching launches. The crew were informed of the importance of a good lookout and never stopping upstream of fixed objects such as piers and buoys.
- In another incident a 4- stopped momentarily to avoid a 2x. They were swept and blown by the fresh breeze towards Dove Pier. They made contact with the green buoy 50m before Dove Pier, and it partially swamped the boat leading to a near capsize. They rowed to a nearby landing and emptied their boat.
- A 2x was landing at the club against the flood tide in strong gusty winds. Sudden strong winds and the stream pushed the 2x further towards Dove Pier than anticipated and onto a moored boat at the end of the pier. A coach was accompanying them in a launch. The crew followed their coach's instructions and safely pushed off the moored boat. There was a discussion on how to avoid such situations in the future by accounting for the wind when crossing to land on the flood tide, and crossing further away from Dove Pier.
- A 1x was stationary in the middle of the fairway. Two 8+s were rowing down the fairway and the 1x moved to their right so as to not block the fairway for the 8+s but had not taken into account the proximity to Dove Pier. This adjustment pushed the 1x onto the Pier and the rower was not able to push themselves off. A coach in a launch helped the rower to free themselves but, in the process, they fell out of the boat. A coaching launch recovered the rower, and another coaching launch recovered the 1x.

Being swept into Dove Pier can be extremely dangerous. It is instructive to read the report of the Dove Pier Incident that occurred in October 2006, a copy of the report is included with this report. Dove Pier is 500m upriver from Hammersmith bridge. Its pontoon is joined by a footbridge to the river wall. It provides moorings for many houseboats.

The water is relatively warm in October; it is worrying to think of what could have happened had that incident occurred in spring or early summer when the water is cold, but the air can be relatively warm. The gasp reflex is related to the rate of skin cooling and people often do not survive the initial cold water shock, see [Extreme Cold Water Shock Advert](#).

See the Safety Alerts: -

- [Safety-Alert-dont-be-swept-into-danger.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-Flow-around-bends-in-rivers.pdf](#)

Take care with head injuries

A rower was standing on the bank and was approached by someone holding an upright oar with the blade on the ground and the handle at the top. The oar slipped out of their hand, and the top wooden part of the oar hit the rower on the top of their head. Later that evening though, the rower started to get symptoms like confusion, headaches, and nausea. They subsequently went to A&E, and the doctor said that they had a concussion.

A 4- and a 4+ were travelling in opposite directions in the inshore zone at sunrise. The boats collided at speed. The bow rower in the 4+ was struck on the head. First aid advice was given and the rower was advised to seek medical advice at the earliest opportunity. They consulted their GP surgery and was told that they had suffered a serious non-life-threatening head/neck injury. This was subsequently confirmed by doctors to be a serious concussion. The rower is reported to be recovering well.

Please take care to avoid head injuries and if they happen then be prepared to seek medical advice. See [Safety-Alert-Head-Injuries-2018.pdf](#) and [Safety-Alert-Concussion.pdf](#).

Take care in the Gym

A rower was in the gym and was putting a bar back on the rack to hang it up. A bar weighing about 8kg was loose and fell more than one metre and hit another rower on the back of the head, as they were bending over. A first aider attended.

Speed does not confer right of way

There was a collision between a 4+ and an 8+ when the 4+ stopped because it had become too close to the bank. The breeze pushed the boat into the centre of the river, and it was about to row back when it was hit by the 8+ travelling in the opposite direction rowing at firm pressure. There were warning shouts from the bank but the 8+ hit the 4+ at full speed.

In another incident, about 2.5k into their first “piece”, a 2- collided with a 1x paddling in opposite direction. The 2- was on the wrong side of the centre line because the water there was more sheltered and they were racing. They were able to hold it up enough to soften the blow. The boats collided and came to a dead stop.

During a busy morning an 8+, clearly marked with hi-vis jackets, was waiting for another 8+ to pass before tucking in closer to the bank. A 4- approached from behind and attempted to row between the stationary boats, despite there being insufficient space. There were verbal warnings from other rowers, the 4- continued at speed and collided with the 8+. The bow steer of the 4- has subsequently apologised. Please do not attempt to pass between stationary boats or when space is insufficient.

Just because yours may be the fastest boat that does not mean that you do not have to give way to others.

Take care to keep a good lookout

It is not sufficient to keep to the correct place on the waterway, it is also necessary to maintain a good lookout, as the following incidents demonstrate.

- A 4x rowed into the bank. The crew was reminded to look behind more regularly.
- In another incident, an 8+ hit the bank when a cox instructed the crew to easy rather than to hold it up. The bows of the 8+ were damaged (see photo).
- A 2x was rowing in the dark and was aware that there were two boats afloat from a neighbouring club. They saw one of these boats when it was a couple of hundred metres away. They were subsequently involved in a head on collision. The crew of the other boat confirmed that it had the appropriate lights. Please take care to keep a good lookout by day and by night
- There was a report of two boats colliding on a bend due to them not maintaining the correct position on the waterway as one boat was too close to the centre.
- A J14 2x was heading upstream as part of a coaching group and went very wide around a bend. It then stopped in the middle of the river to correct its course. A 4x was coming downstream doing a time trial, also cut the corner into the middle and failed to see the stationary 2x in its path. Coaches shouted warnings but crews did not react quickly enough. The boats collided.
- A 4x was rowing past a marina at paddling speed when, without warning a launch emerged from the marina exit, just past a large, moored motor cruiser. The crew of the 4x performed an emergency stop but could not come to a complete stop in time and collided with the launch. There was damage to the bow of the 4x.



Please remind crews to be aware that being in the correct place on the river is necessary but not sufficient to avoid collisions. It is also important to keep a good lookout.

Take care not to turn upstream of a bridge

A 4x+ capsized after turning upstream of a bridge shortly after launching. The 4x+ collided with the bridge and was pinned against the bridge for 10 minutes or more. Coaches from another club were made aware of the situation and went to assist. The 4x+ had partially capsized and rowers were in the water, holding on to the boat. The rescue was extremely difficult as it was challenging to keep the launch in the correct position to allow a safe recovery. The rescue was completed by four coaching launches. All the members of the crew were rescued, and the boat was recovered. Once ashore, the crew received immediate support including showers, warm drinks, and emotional care.

Trailer tyre failure

A trailer tyre suffered a total failure on the motorway. The incident occurred close to a junction, so the driver was able to leave the motorway and onto the hard shoulder of the junction slip road in a safe and controlled manner. The trailer had been serviced in January 2024, with no issues noted with the tyre, and the tyre itself was quite new, leading to the assumption that the incident was caused by a foreign object either at the scene, or previously in the journey.



The incident highlighted the lack of some key equipment within the towing vehicle. The lightweight warning triangle kept getting blown over by passing vehicles. The stopping location was on a slight bend, so a warning sign was essential.

The club resolved to provide: -

- Hi Vis vests for all occupants of the vehicle.
- A method of lifting the trailer to remove and replace wheels.
- A torch in case of an incident happening in darkness.
- A more robust warning triangle, which stays in place.

Please take care to learn from this incident

Think about footwear

A rower was running as part of warm up as instructed by their coach. The rowers slipped on some wet mud and landed on gravel causing a cut to their knee. The rower was wearing flip flop style shoes and was reminded to wear solid trailers when running or partaking in land training.

Please take care to check your shoes

One of the shoes in a 2x was loose, and so during rowing it rotated around, causing the rowers to lose balance and capsize. The other rower was able to get free from the boat with no difficulty but the rower with a loose shoe took longer due to the shoe being loose. A launch from another club assisted. It is not just heel restraints that should be checked, please take care to check that shoes are in good condition and properly attached prior to going afloat.

It was sculler's first time in a single and they capsized when trying to turn. The sculler's foot was stuck in the shoe. The heel restraints were tied and checked prior to the outing by the sculler but the right one was too loose. The shoe's quick release mechanism was partly wrapped under the shoe and therefore was not accessible. After a short period of time, the foot slipped out of the shoe.

Please do not use names in Incident Reports.

Please try to avoid the inclusion of people's names in Incident Reports, particularly those of Juniors. This is for safeguarding and data protection reasons.

The Provision of Rescue Launches at Regattas

I was asked whether there is any RowSafe guidance on how many rescue launches are recommended for Regattas- in relation to length of the rowing course.

The response was that this is one of those questions that cannot be answered. It all depends on the event Risk Assessment. There are so many factors to consider, such as: -

- the number of crews afloat at any one time
- the presence or absence of umpires in launches
- the hazards on and near the course
- the level of experience and expertise of the rowers involved
- the presence or absence of adaptive rowers or rowers with needs
- the types of boats used
- the presence or absence of juniors
- the conditions on the day of the event
- the number of places where rowers can get ashore and the number where they cannot
- the presence or absence of marshals with throw lines
- the presence or absence of other boats afloat

It may help to consider your safety provision in previous years and to judge whether that was adequate. If it was, and the hazards, etc. are unchanged then it may be that the same provision will be sufficient this year.

Work with Paddle UK

Several Incident Reports contained information about interactions between rowers and canoeists or Stand Up Paddleboarders. These have been shared with my colleague at PaddleUK. PaddleUK has also shared an Incident Report with me.

Take Care and be prepared for serious incidents

Two groups of junior rowers went for a run, one group being ahead of the other. A member of the leading group felt unwell, stopped and subsequently collapsed. This rower was found by the following group. Coaches at the club were notified. The rower who collapsed was supported by the following group of rowers and by a passer-by who delivered CPR. An AED was brought, and the casualty was subsequently supported by a community first responder, an Air Ambulance and two land ambulances.

The rower had suffered a cardiac incident. They were taken to hospital, and they were reported to be making a good recovery ten days after admission.

The mental health of the other rowers was well supported by members of the Air Ambulance organisation. The club is planning to improve its internal communication and the way it communicates with parents.

Incidents like this are not common but they are not unknown. Please take care to be prepared to deal with them. Please ensure that: -

- Members are accompanied when exercising
- Sufficient members are equipped to call for help
- Members are trained to deliver CPR
- Members know where to find an AED and know how to use it.

If the club has its own AED, then: -

- Ensure that it is available for use
- Ensure that it is kept in good condition: -
 - Protected from harm, weather, vandals, etc.
 - Pads are in date
 - Battery is in date and in good condition

Training in CPR and the use of an AED is best delivered face-to-face but there is online training available at: -

- [Lifesaver learning | Resuscitation Council UK](#),
- [Learn CPR in 15 minutes for free | RevivR - BHF](#),
- [How to do CPR | St John Ambulance](#) and
- [How to Use a Defibrillator \(AED\) - First Aid Training - St John Ambulance - YouTube](#)

Also, please see the following Safety Alerts: -

- [Safety-Alert-Staying-Alive-FINAL.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-Automated-External-Defibrillators-1.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-What-to-do-if-a-rower-collapses-in-a-boat.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-Get-help-to-buy-your-own-AED-July-2021.pdf](#)

Safety Alerts published in October

Some issues become more important as we transition from summer, through autumn and into winter. At this time rainfall can be expected to cause river flows to increase and temperatures can be expected to fall. It is also the time of year when some clubs will stop using their trailers.

There has also been some concern about the effects of wash from launches on rowers, as explained above.

For those reasons the following Safety Alerts have been issued and will accompany this report.

- [Safety-Alert-Flow-upstream-of-weirs.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-What-to-wear-When-it-is-Cold.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-End-of-Season-Checks-on-Trailers.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-Consider-your-wash.pdf](#)

The Coke Fallacy again

It has again been suggested that a rower drink Coke to protect themselves against the effects of accidentally swallowing contaminated water.

I have often stated that Coke, and similar drinks, have absolutely no prophylactic benefit to people exposed to contaminated water.

I recently took Medical Advice, and this is the advice that has been provided: -

“I would advise that all crews, safety boats and even umpires and officials on the water should certainly wash exposed skin (certainly their hands) with soap and hot water – preferably a shower.

I would also advise that all equipment (boats and oars) is washed down.

The advice about coke (in fact it was flat coke) is false. Drinking (flat) coke has NO effect on the incidence of gastro-enteritis. If anything, it may make the individual vomit, making them feel much worse and exposing others to any E.Coli that they have swallowed. The high sugar content of the drink may worsen any diarrhoea and worsen any developing gastroenteritis dehydration. However, if a rower feels ill, or develops gastroenteritis or diarrhoea it is certainly worth informing any healthcare professional managing their symptoms that this could be as a result of an E.Coli infection.”