



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

May 2026

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Young rowers save the life of an unknown man

One Friday evening in November 2025 the crew of a 2x, who were both aged 15, were rigging their boat for a race that weekend. A member of the public approached and asked for a defibrillator (AED) stating that a man had collapsed outside. One rower went to the place where the man had collapsed whilst the other rower went to fetch the AED.

A few people were there, and a woman was already giving CPR. The rower could tell immediately that she was not very proficient, so he took over from her.

The man's heart was not beating, and he was experiencing [Agonal gasps](#). The rower did not give mouth to mouth, as he normally would do, because there was an odour of cannabis around the man and he did not want to get that in contact with his mouth.

After about a minute the other rower arrived with the AED.

The rower continued to deliver CPR whilst the other rower opened the AED and used the scissors to remove the unknown man's shirt. The unknown man had a lot of chest hair so, as the rower continued to deliver CPR, the other rower used the razor from the AED kit and shaved the man's chest.

They had the paramedics on the line and were communicating with them the entire time.

The rower continued to deliver CPR and at that point the man's heart started beating. They put the pads on and the AED started scanning the man's heart rhythm and stated "no shock advised".

After about a minute, the paramedics arrived. They took over quickly. The rower continued to deliver CPR and explained what they had done up to that point.

There was a man in the vicinity who was the unknown man's friend. However, he did not speak English, the other rower recognised that he was speaking Albanian and called an Albanian friend to try and ask the man what had happened as the paramedics thought that it was an overdose, but they wanted to know of what.

The other rower's Albanian friend tried to translate, however the man appeared to be both drunk and high, so he had difficulty communicating. The rower instructed the people in the vicinity to cover the man with some coats as it was freezing outside.

The Paramedics gave the man an injection of adrenaline and he regained consciousness; they took him to the ambulance. By that time more paramedics had arrived to help.

These two rowers have been nominated for [Royal Humane Society](#) awards.

A Sculler saves the life of another sculler at a regatta in Belgium

A British rower in a 1x had just finished his race and was paddling up the course in the return lane. At about the 1750 mark of the 2000 metre course he heard an off-duty nurse and others shouting from the bank. The spectators had seen that another rower in a 1x in a subsequent race had collapsed and capsized in the middle of the course. The rower was barely holding on to the hull of his boat and had not managed to get himself onto his boat and out of the water. The rower appeared from a distance to be barely conscious with only his face showing above the water.

The nurse could not see any other boats in the vicinity until the British rower appeared. She shouted to him. The British rower heard the shouts and then noticed the rower in the water. He thought that this rower was about to go under, so he rowed over to him.

The British rower left his boat and entered the water to assist the collapsed rower. At this point the collapsed rower was unresponsive and remained so as the British rower moved him towards the bank.

The British rower held the collapsed rower out of the water with his arms under the rower's armpits. The collapsed rower was held, with his back to the British rower, partially supported by the hull of his boat. The British rower sporadically used his right arm to hold onto his own boat and kicked the two hulls towards the bank.

Luckily the water by the bank was shallow enough to stand up and with help from the off-duty nurse and others they were able to drag the collapsed rower out of the water.

The nurse then took over the support of the collapsed rower. She completed a primary survey and checked the man's pupils. She concluded that the rower was confused and not fully conscious and talked to him to keep him conscious and reactive, and to reassure him. She also asked other spectators for the use of their coats to keep the rower warm.

The nurse stayed with the collapsed rower until an event paramedic and then an ambulance arrived. The rower was taken away in the ambulance.

These British rower and the nurse have both been nominated for [Royal Humane Society](#) awards.

There were comments about the lack of effective safety cover at this Regatta. I have written to World Rowing about this and am awaiting a reply.

Incidents Reported in May

Take care near swans, particularly near their nests

The swan, near a rowing club, is particularly aggressive and patrols a large part of the water attacking anything that attempts to pass. On one occasion a 4x had gone past the swan and it followed, landing on the stern of the boat and causing damage to the rudder bolts. The club gave this advice to its members: -

- Only half the crew should row at one time
- Keep blades on water as you row past as this seems to be less threatening to the swan than blades off the water
- Do not turn close to a swan's nest
- Do not slap blades on the water as this appears to make the swan more aggressive

There is further advice at [Swans and Rowing - British Rowing](#).

Take care when passing a launching and landing area

An 8+ was rowed at speed past a neighbouring club as many of their boats were launching and landing. This resulted in a collision with a 2x which was crossing to its landing stage.

Please be extra careful when passing a launching and landing area.

Take care to look to keep a good lookout

A 2x was paddling at steady state on the correct side of the river. They collided head on with an unseen moored dredging barge, damaging the bow of their boat. The 2x capsized, but the crew were able to right the boat and paddle back to safety.

In another incident, an 8+ collided with the stern of a stationary coaching launch; this was a low-speed collision because the 8+ was “holding it up” at the time. The 8+ was passing another 8+ that was alongside the coaching launch and the cox claims that they could not see the launch because of the presence of their rowers’ bodies.

In a further incident, a rower in a 1x was proceeding upstream on the correct side of the river. A coaching launch was coming downstream on the wrong side of the river. It was alongside a crew, and the coach was looking at the crew and not looking ahead. There was a collision that caused one of the rower’s sculls to break. They, and their boat, were recovered by the launch. The club issued a reminder to all coaching launch drivers that they must always keep a good look-out and be aware of all river users, not just the boat they are coaching.

Please remember the advice in Section 5.1 of [RowSafe](#) is: -

Coxes and steers (including scullers) are expected to:

- *Always keep a good lookout when afloat. Coxes who cannot see directly ahead should enlist the help of members of their crew.*
- *If the cox or steers does not know that the water ahead is clear then they should stop, or at the very least, slow down.*

...and

Launch drivers (and coaches when driving launches) are expected to:

- *Keep a good lookout in all directions at all times when afloat.*

A benefit of keeping a good lookout

The rower in a 1x was paddling upstream, in the correct navigation channel. They looked over their shoulder every few strokes as recommended and noticed a narrow boat in the same navigation channel which they assumed was also proceeding up-river. As they got closer, they realised that it was in fact heading down-river in the wrong navigation channel and had to manoeuvre quickly to avoid a collision.

The person in charge of the narrowboat seemed unaware either that they were on the wrong side of the river or of the danger they had put rowers in with their carelessness.

Keeping a good lookout saved the rower from a potentially serious incident.

Take care to check your boat before going afloat

The crew of a 2x crew let go of their blades, following a start, and capsized. Stroke surfaced quickly but bow struggled to release their feet and was under water for a significantly longer period. The heel restraints were subsequently examined and found to be defective.

Take care and be prepared for the unexpected

A 4x was paddling upriver on the correct side of the river and a narrowboat was travelling downstream in the middle of the river. The narrowboat suddenly steered to the wrong side of river. The 4x eased. The narrowboat collided with the 4x and drove on to nearly hit the bank on the wrong side. It then drove along the wrong bank, the driver having to duck under trees. The coach chased after the narrowboat in the launch to try to photograph its river licence, but it didn't have one. The driver gave the coach their name and phone number.

The bow was knocked off the 4x and it was unrowable. No rowers were injured. The crew was returned to their club by their launch and a launch from another club.

This incident was reported to the Navigation Authority, and it was recommended that it should also be reported to the police.

Antisocial behaviour

A rower in a 1x was rowing back to the club when he heard a crack of an air rifle and then something hit the stern of the boat. The rower heard a second crack and then something hit the water near the stern. Due to the trees and foliage, they were unable to see anyone on the bank. The rower continued rowing and warned other rowers and a launch driver. There was no damage to the boat. This incident was reported to the police.

In another incident, in the evening as the juniors were putting equipment away, a black BMW drove past, hooted and then at least three people were hit by something fired from the vehicle. Their injuries were superficial, red mark on the skin, nobody was seriously hurt. The incident was reported to the police who are following it up. Other club members have been notified.

In a further incident, a man approached a crew of junior boys who were turning. He was behaving oddly, looking at the boys, trying to talk to them. The coach told the boys to spin and go so they could get away but unfortunately this drew the man's attention to the coach. The man tried to engage the coach in conversation, blocking their exit and reaching out to touch them. The coach pushed past and left. This experienced coach was unsettled by this incident and is now nervous about using this part of the river.

Please remember the anti-social behaviour advice in Section 9.2 of [RowSafe](#) is: -

- *Don't REACT*
- *REMOVE yourself from the situation*
- *REPORT to the Navigation Authority, Police, British Rowing, etc.*
- *Offer counselling or support to the people affected*
- *Provide First Aid, etc, to anyone injured.*

Take care when driving at events

The officials' welfare car was driven around the back of the start tower where it collided with the events cabin. The car was badly damaged and thought to be a write-off and there was damage to the cabin. It was suspected that the driver had been drinking. The police were notified and they interviewed the driver.



Check the depth of the water

An 8+ was rowing on an ebb tide near low water when the hull grounded on a shoal that scraped along the whole of the boat. This ripped a hole in the stern section of the boat, deeply scratched the bow section, tore out the fin and badly bent the rudder. No rowers were injured. Please take care to consider the depth of the water.

Don't carry unnecessary equipment that could pose a safety risk

Three members of the crew of a 4+, including the cox, rowed across a busy river with heavy trestles "wrapped" around their bodies. Had they capsized then the consequences would have been severe. Please consider the potential consequences before doing anything unusual.

Take care with your wash

A coach was driving a launch at speed in the vicinity of small rowing boats. The boats behind this launch were left with unpleasant and at times problematic wash.

Please take care to consider others and watch your wash.

Take care when moving boats on land

While carrying a 4+ from the trailer towards the boating area at a regatta, one of the riggers bumped a passing member of the public. This person went to Race Registration to complain.

Please take care when moving boats on land particularly if there are other people present.

Take care with ticks

A rower noticed a tick on their leg. Once back on land a coach removed it using tweezers close to skin avoiding the tick abdomen. They applied antiseptic wipes and checked that the tick was intact. Ticks can carry Lyme disease; this is a bacterial infection that can be spread to humans by infected ticks. It's usually easier to treat if it's diagnosed early. There is further information here [Lyme disease - NHS](#)

Take care with weight distribution in launches

A coach in a launch noticed that their ankles were getting wet and called for backup which arrived in less than 60 seconds. The coach was rescued by another launch and did not enter the water. The launch capsized.

Subsequently the launch was tested and no faults were found. The bung was in place and there were no holes or other points of water ingress. It was suspected that some water entered the vessel when it was put on the water; this together with fuel tanks (20l) being situated next to the engine with the battery, makes the launch "stern heavy". It was thought that when the launch stopped from speed, the stern moves down and the wash came over the transom causing the launch to take on water and capsize.

Please take care and think about the weight distribution in launches. In most cases, tiller steered launches should have their fuel tanks and batteries secured well forward. Consider using a tiller extension. I have just bought one for one of the club's launches and will evaluate it over the next few weeks. Watch this space.

Drivers should take care when reducing speed and coming of the plane. It may help to turn through 90 degrees and move away from the wash.



Avoid using bungees or take care with them

When a rower was removing the bungee cord from the trailer, it snapped back and the plastic hook hit them in the eye. The rower went to Eye A&E, on the recommendation of the paramedics present where they were examined and treated by a doctor. The injury included damaged retina, bruised eyeball, a small bleed behind eye and internal swelling.

Please avoid the use of bungees and replace them with straps. If bungees are used, then take great care.

Rescued thanks to the RNLI

The conditions were good when a 4+ boated but as they returned the waves got worse. They took on so much water that they began to sink even though they were bailing. They were close to the Lifeboat station and, they shouted to the RNLI, the cox inflated their lifejacket and asked the rowers to take their feet out of the shoes. Thankfully, they were rescued by the RNLI.

Take care when the weather is hot

A rower in a 1x started feeling unwell during an afternoon session and was unable to continue. A launch took the rower and their boat back to the club. The rower was cooled down using a wet shirt and fan and took on fluids.

Please note the following advice in section 8.2 of [RowSafe](#), Sunburn, Heat Illness and Exhaustion and in the [Safety-Alert-Avoiding-and-Treating-Heat-Exhaustion-July-2022-2.pdf](#) and the British Rowing advice [Avoiding heat illness v2.1.pdf](#) Please also see the following advice in section 9.1 of [RowSafe](#).

Example Risk Management Plan

Hazards associated with the weather

Hazard	Barriers (to reduce the probability)	Hazardous Events	Controls (to reduce the severity of harm)
Hot sunny weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid outings in the middle of the day• Adjust activity levels to suit conditions• Rest in shade (e.g. under bridges, in the shade of a tree)• Wear appropriate clothing (thin, breathable)• Use water for cooling	Hyperthermia (sun stroke)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move into a cooler area, remove outer clothing• Use shower with cool, not cold, water or cool in river/lake• Seek medical treatment if severe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use sunscreen• Avoid outings in the middle of the day• Wear appropriate clothing (hat and covered arms, etc.)	Sunburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use after sun cream• Seek medical treatment if severe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry water and drink regularly	Dehydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to drink, carry drinking water• Seek medical treatment if severe

Please be polite in Incident Reports

Recently more expletives have appeared in Incident Reports. These are usually quotes of what someone else has said to rowers. Please take care not to do this as it can cause emails to fall foul of British Rowing's bad language filters. Anyway, it is simply not nice, and you can be better than people who swear.

How much can scullers and steers see when they look ahead?

Following a collision between a 2x and a kayak, we were asked this question. My answer was that "it all depends".

It depends on: -

- the visibility
- the position of the sun in the sky (low in the sky and directly ahead makes it difficult)
- the size of the object they are trying to see
- the conspicuity of the object they are trying to see (Hi-Viz helps)
- the light level (bright sun or dull and overcast)
- how frequently they look
- the care and time taken when looking ahead
- whether they look over both shoulders
- their awareness of where they are

A colleague suggested that the following factors were also relevant: -

- the colour of object
- the background

Another colleague suggested that steers should be able to see ahead and peripherally sufficiently well to be able to navigate safely whatever the water conditions, infrastructure and other river traffic. This will ideally involve looking over both shoulders intermittently with the defined level being every 5 strokes, but more often as needed e.g. when navigating around a hazard, or when in significant vessel traffic.

In general, most rowers manage to navigate safely and avoid collisions, most of the time. Looking ahead is not easy and that is why we have to take extra care to do so.

In Section 5.1 of [RowSafe](#), under the expectations of Coxes and Steers, it says: -

If the cox or steers does not know that the water ahead is clear then they should stop, or at the very least, slow down

Scoliosis advice

A club has a new member who has [Scoliosis](#), this is characterised by a side-to-side curve of the spine. This rower has completed a Learn to Row course and has been medically cleared to row, but they cannot lift boats. They also have trouble rowing in crew boats as they cannot achieve full range of motion. The club has no adaptive equipment. The club wants to accommodate this rower but is having difficulty doing so.

My response was that if they do not have a stable boat (1x) then they could consider fitting adaptive rowing floats (sometimes called pontoon floats) to a standard 1x. Many clubs do this to help new rowers to go afloat safely. They convert a standard racing 1x into a safe and stable platform.

There is more information on adaptive rowing equipment on the British Rowing website here [Adaptive-Rowing-Equipment-SG.pdf](#). and [Adaptive Rowing - British Rowing](#) and information from suppliers here [Rowing Centre UK](#), and [WinTech Pontoons - Pair – Oarsport Limited](#). This may also be of interest [British Rowing - Adaptive Equipment Fund | Active Together](#).

This rower needs assistance to carry their boat on land. Perhaps the club can persuade its other members to help the rower or that they have friends or family who can support them. They may never want to be a competitive rower, but you may be able to help them to row alongside other rowers and enjoy the sport and the community nature of rowing.

I copied this response to adaptiverowing@britishrowing.org this is a group of adaptive rowing coaches. One of them added: -

“ROWING 2X – One of the easiest ways to introduce and support adaptive rowers to the sport is through Supported Adaptive Doubles - [Supported Adaptive Double – Adaptive Rowing UK](#). This requires no special equipment (in most cases) just the support of a fellow rower in the bow seat to help steady the boat and coach the athlete.

Collision avoidance in races

It is always important to take care to avoid collisions because they can cause injury and damage. This is as important when racing as it is when training. After all, rowing is a non-contact sport.

There is an urban myth that you have to have a collision in order for a crew to be disqualified. This is simply not true. Just ask an umpire and they will tell you that the Rules of Racing say, "**Any crew is free to take evasive action to avoid being fouled without suffering disadvantage**" (see Rule 7-5-2 c).

They may also tell you that if the Race Umpire detects interference, (i.e. conduct by a crew which impedes the legitimate progress of an opponent who is on their proper course) they shall warn the offending crew (Rule 7-5-5 a & b).

Once warned, a crew can be disqualified if it gains an advantage from its interference. (Rule 7-5-7 a).

It is not necessary to have a collision in order to win. Just ask an umpire, they know the rules.

Rowers who have had seizures

We are always keen to enable people with conditions to row, if this can be done safely. It is always better to try to find safe ways in which people can enjoy the sport rather than to tell them that they cannot do it.

There were two requests relating to rowers who have had seizures. The response to each included a link to the Medical Panel Guidance on the website here [Rowing and Epilepsy - British Rowing](#).

I copied the Adaptive Rowing Coach Group (adaptiverowing@britishrowing.org) and one coach responded with the following advice: -

- *Individuals rowing in Support Adaptive 2xs can only row stern*
- *The Support Rower must practice the seizure manoeuvre with the person who has epilepsy.*
- *They must only row with safety launch cover*
- *Their 2x boat must also have safety floats on the rigger*

This rower and their parent were invited to join the “Rowing with Epilepsy” WhatsApp group.

Nothing in medicine is simple; with epilepsy, in all its myriad of forms and with every individual's experience being unique to them, this is even more true.

There was some confusion because one coach referred to the “12-month seizure guidance”. This is no longer valid. It was included in a previous version of the guidance based on the DVLA rule, but it is not in the current British Rowing guidance or in the [Epilepsy Society Guidance](#).

Advice for a coach who is concerned about being sued

A former volunteer coach has been contacted informally by a former participant indicating they intend to seek damages in relation to a recently diagnosed medical condition, which they appear to attribute to their time rowing. No formal claim or correspondence from a solicitor has been received at this stage. I was asked: -

- How to go about contacting the insurer providing coverage under my British Rowing membership at the time
- Any other appropriate steps I should take at this stage

The response was that British Rowing Coach Members have Professional Indemnity Insurance. There is more information at <https://www.britishrowing.org/insurance/>. Individual circumstances should be discussed with Marsh Sport. There is information on how to do this here <https://www.marshsport.co.uk/contact-us.html>

In order for your rower's claim to be successful, they will have to prove that they have been harmed and that this harm was caused by you. They could claim that the harm was caused by intent, but this would be difficult to prove. They could also claim that the harm was due to your negligence. All you would have to show is that the level of care that you took was reasonable. Reasonable care is care that a reasonable person would consider to be reasonable.

There may well be a lawyer in your club who can help you.

Rowing Safety at the Koninklijke Nederlandse Roeibond (KNRB)

I have a correspondent in the Netherlands who has written to share information about progress in the Royal Dutch Rowing Federation. They tell me that in 2025 they have been promoting incident reporting and saw an increase during the year. This allowed them to publish a year report on safety based on numbers although they are not yet on the level it should be according to our estimations. Reporting incidents is not an obligation for Dutch clubs.

I replied explaining that it takes time to create a culture where people are willing to share information about their misfortunes for the benefit of others. We take great care to thank people for doing so and to ensure that there are no negative consequences for submitting a report. There may well be a better response by keeping reporting voluntary rather than by making it compulsory.

They have launched a contest on ideas for innovations that can increase safety for rowers. We received over 35 ideas so far. The winner will be announced at the World Rowing Championships in Amsterdam.

Please think about the innovations that we could introduce. We are planning to have a similar competition in British Rowing. My colleagues will develop this idea and launch it on the British Rowing social media channels. I expect that some of you are like me and do not “do” social media so I will notify you all by email when this is launched.

Towing boat trailers in Europe

In last month’s report I provided information on the trailer towing and overhang rules in the UK. I have since been told that a UK rowing club trailer was stopped by Italian police, the club had their trailer and truck impounded for 2 months, had to pay a large fine and had to cut 180 mm off one or more boats to be able to come home.

It was suggested that I include information on towing in Europe in this report but, unfortunately, I am not an expert on this subject. I did a little research and found the following: -

- It is necessary to register the trailer before taking it abroad, there is more information here [Register your trailer to take it abroad - GOV.UK](#) and [Towing In Europe / UK trailer registration rules have been updated](#)
- Advice on lighting requirements can be found here [lighting Requirements for a trailer in the UK and Europe](#) and [Trailer Lighting Rules - Towing and Trailers Ltd](#)
- Early in this video [I Can’t Believe This Happened... Caravan Towing Laws 2026 Have Changed.](#) there is information about the need for a B + E driving licence.
- Your passage through customs may be easier if you have an Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission (ATA) Carnet (sometimes called a "merchandise passport") there is more information here [Towing rowing trailers to the EU - British Rowing](#)

As you can see, I am not an expert on this subject. If you are, and are willing to help, then please contact me at safety@britishrowing.org.