



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

June 2026

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Young rowers come to the aid of a member of the public

A passerby notified a coach on a bike and a junior 2x of a person in distress in the water. The 2x backed down to allow the casualty to grab hold of the boat to keep themselves afloat. The coach then rang for the safety launch to attend. After a few minutes, the safety launch arrived and effected a rescue. The casualty was helped out of the water and into the launch and they were driven back to the rowing club in the launch. The launch driver stayed talking with the casualty until an ambulance arrived and the casualty was taken to hospital.

The club subsequently checked and the young rowers did not suffer any lasting effects from the incident.

Sculler comes to the aid of a member of the public

A rower in a 1x noticed that a member of the public appeared to be unconscious on a steep bank, not far above the water level. They could not be roused by shouting or whistle blowing. The rower phoned 999 and provided the “what3words” location. They guided the ambulance to the casualty. The casualty was left in the care of the emergency services.

Incidents Reported in June

Take care to avoid slips, trips, and falls

There have been several incidents in which rowers have been injured when slipping and falling. These include: -

- A rower wearing Crocs tripped on a landing stage badly grazing their knees.
- A rower tripped while going up steps and landed on their knees and the side of their forearm. This resulted in a fractured radius bruised & grazed knees and face. Their arm will be in a cast for four to six weeks.
- A rower lost their balance while getting out of a boat and banged their head on a concrete step.
- A rower slipped while getting out of the boat and fell back onto the boat.

Please take care to wear appropriate footwear and provide support to rowers who need it.

Take care to maintain launches in good condition

A launch was idling next to 4+ as a coach was talking to the crew. The coach put the launch into reverse to move away from the crew, but the launch moved forwards and mounted the 4+ in between seats 3 and 2. Nobody was injured. The engine was stopped to stop further progress and no injury occurred. This launch will not be driven again until the problem has been rectified.

Antisocial behaviour afloat

There were many incidents of behaviour afloat where rowers were intimidated by the drivers of motorboats. In some cases, this appears to be due to ignorance or incompetence, particularly when the incidents involved hire boats with inexperienced divers. In other cases, the motivation may not have been so innocent. The incidents include: -

- The helm of a hire boat drove their boat on the wrong side of the river and appeared to try to cause a rower in a 1x to capsize. The helm was asked to move away but they drove straight towards the 1x. It is reported that the users of these boats have little regard for other river users and cause significant disruption.
- A motor cruiser entered a regatta's navigation channel and entered the course shortly after a race had passed. It took evasive action to avoid two SUPs and had a near miss with racing crews.
- A hired motorboat (an inflatable with steering wheel) collided with a rower in a 1x. The driver said that they didn't know how to stop the engine. The driver then revved the engine and caused more damage
- A boat, locally known as the pizza barge, wanted to turn around, and so told the young rowers waiting in an 8x+ to move out of the way. They said they could not without hitting the boats around them in the queue and the driver launched a torrent of expletives at them. The coach then stepped in to try and explain why they could not move and was also subjected to the verbal abuse. The owner of the barge then lost concentration and hit the bank.
- A rental motor craft approached a 1x on the left side of the river, against the traffic rules. The boat appeared to be rented by a family of tourists unfamiliar with river traffic rules. They drove over directly towards the 1x and narrowly missing a head on collision.
- During a learn to row course, two 4x+s doing drills next to the bank and a motor cruiser approached slowly but then steered closer to the rowing boats and increased speed. The cruiser slowed down (audible decrease in revving of the engine revs) once it had passed the boats. During the same session, the same motor cruiser approached a group of 1xs at speed on a direct course towards one of the participants. The motor cruiser made no attempt to slow down, alter course, or take any other avoiding action.
- A small motorboat was out of control, approached a 1x around a corner at high speed on the wrong side of river. The driver stated that the throttle was stuck.
- A rower in a 1x collided with the starboard bows of a motor cruiser as it was reversing from out of a marina. At no time did either of the boat's occupants warn the rower or seek to avoid the collision or seek to assist the rower after the collision.
- One particular motorboat has been increasingly anti-social over the past few weeks, one morning it severely washed down two crews on purpose and started screaming obscenities at the coach.

Please see the item below on Antisocial behaviour.

Take care with heel restraints

The results of boat inspections at two competitions were reported using the Incident Reporting system (I regard this as best practice). The failures at one competition were: -

- 18 boats of all sizes failed due to missing or inadequate heel restraints,
- one boat had missing hatch covers and
- one boat had under-inflated buoyancy bags.

At the other competition 20 boats were inspected and three boats had an un-tied heel restraints.

Try not to panic

A launch driver found that they were drifting downstream towards a weir. Their engine had stopped and would not restart so they used their radio to call for assistance. Another launch came to their aid. They did not realise that their kill cord had detached as they were leaning across the launch.

Please take care not to panic.

Take care with communications

There was a collision on a bend between a 2x proceeding to the start of a regatta and a racing 4x that had strayed off the course. No rowers were injured but there was significant damage to the 2x.

The 2x had been stationary but had started to move following an instruction from a bankside Umpire.

It had been agreed between the course umpire and one of the two start umpires that racing crews should be held on the start until returning crews are safely clear of the start. Unfortunately, a second start umpire started a race before this clearance had been obtained. Unsuccessful attempts were made to stop the race.



Please take extra care with communications.

If you receive instructions from an Umpire or Marshall, then: -

1. keep a good lookout for yourselves and do not rely on instructions and
2. follow instructions without delay, safety windows are time limited.

You are still responsible for the navigation of your boat. Please take care to keep yourself safe even when you are following instructions.

Take care to look where you are going

There were several incidents where crews collided with boats in front of them due to them not keeping an adequate lookout and not paying sufficient attention to their steering. These include: -

- During warm-up for a final 2k to finish off a training camp, an 8+ collided with a 4x. The cox was operating a radio in place of a broken cox box, which degraded her ability to steer a straight line as she only had one hand. Five athletes were injured, including a 4cm head laceration requiring medical attention, and the 4x capsized.
- A 2x capsized and a coach in a launch guided them to the bank. The coach held the rigger to help the crew to enter the boat. The coach was not looking astern where another 2x approaching at speed. It collided with the stern of the launch.
- A 2x took the bend too wide and saw a dark green barge too late to avoid contact with the oars. The 2x capsized.
- After looking round and not seeing anything the crew of a 2x collided with a paddle boarder. The board went under a bow rigger, and a blade knocked the person off their feet. The person fell backwards and banged their head on another rigger. The crew apologised and said they could not see him as they were in their blind spot. (The blind spot excuse is never valid – see below,)
- A 4x collided with channel post. The crew was carrying out warm up activities and bow concentrating on warm up rather than steering.
- A gig collided with a 4x travelling in the opposite direction. The cox of the gig reported that their view of the 4x was obscured by their rowers. The rower at bow in the 4x was hit on the back of their head by one of the gig's oars. The RNLI were close by and were alerted. Presumably, the steers of the 4x was not keeping a good lookout either.
- A 2x travelling upstream on the correct side of the river when a 4x came diagonally across the river travelling downstream and there was a clash of blades. Later a rower in the 4x came to apologise. This rower was focussed on the piece and forgot about steering.
- A 2x was sculling steadily on a high fast ebb tide, with no other boats around. When stroke looked round and saw that they were about to collide with a large, moored barge. The crew tried to stop but it was too late, and they hit the barge causing significant damage to the bows of their boat. The bow rower (steerer) was reported to be suitably embarrassed and mortified.

Please remember that in [RowSafe](#) it says: -

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. Steers should keep a good lookout over both left and right shoulders, perhaps assisted by a head mounted mirror or similar device.*
- *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.*

Take care in hot weather

There were several incidents where rowers were affected by the heat, as follows:-

- A member of a racing crew felt unwell after their first race, They had been marshalled in a sunny area on a hot, windless day. The rower was assisted out of the boat into some nearby shade - they seemed dizzy and unsteady and were seen by paramedics.
- On a hot, sunny, windless day, a rower raced, landed, derigged, and rerigged. They felt faint and sat down in the shade. They continued to feel unwell, were seen by paramedics and given cool packs.
- On a hot sunny day, a rower reported getting lightheaded. As they were in a 1x, the coach accompanied them in a slow paddle towards the raft. On the way the rower reported increasing dizziness and was subsequently removed from their 1x and taken to shore by safety boat.

The advice in RowSafe is: -

Hazard	Barriers (to reduce the probability)	Hazardous Events	Controls (to reduce the severity of harm)
Hot sunny weather	• 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)	• 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
	• Use sunscreen • Avoid outings in the middle of the day • Wear appropriate clothing (hat and covered arms, etc.)	Sunburn	• Use after sun cream • Seek medical treatment if severe
	• Carry water and drink regularly	Dehydration	• Continue to drink, carry drinking water • Seek medical treatment if severe

Take care to avoid dogs

The owners of two dogs had been throwing a ball for their dogs to fetch. They did not appreciate the speed of an approaching 4x and the 4x had to complete an emergency stop. There was a minor collision with one of the dogs, but it was not harmed. Please take care to avoid anything swimming in the water.

Take care to plan where you will be practising racing

Two 4-s were training side by side approaching a narrow section of the river. They encountered another 4- travelling slowly in the same direction and forced that crew to take avoiding action. When the coach of the two 4-s was asked to instruct them to easy they were reported to have said "No they have 45 seconds left". This forced the other 4- to move aside and draw in their blades to the extent that they nearly capsized.

Please take care to plan the locations where you will row at speed to avoid racing through narrow or congested areas.

Too old to row?

I was asked whether it was safe for old people to row. A rower who rows in a 4x was asked politely by someone at their club whether it is safe for them to continue rowing. One member of the crew is aged about 90 and wears a heart rate monitor. My response was to keep an eye on the heart rate and ensure that the heart rate does not exceed 220 minus their age. (There are other algorithms, but this is the one that I use, and it is easy to calculate.) Also, please consider neck rotational flexibility and the ability to turn their head to look ahead and try to avoid the heat in the middle of the day so as not to get dehydrated.

I requested medical advice and received the following.

There are many 80- and 90-year-olds who are more capable of rowing and participating in sport than many people 30 years younger. Rowing has always been considered a 'safe' sport for the older rower, especially for those that have rowed regularly during their lives.

Professional advice and medical guidance are always important, provided they are adhered to. Furthermore, the breadth of the limitations on sport participation narrow as one gets older - so observing the recommended limits and being self-regulatory (i.e. recognising that age is affecting performance) also plays a major role.

In summary, the question is complex and virtually unanswerable due to the number of individual factors involved. It comes down to following medical advice and understanding one's own limits.

I recommended that each person should make their own decision based on the advice that they have received and what they honestly feel they can do now.

Product Recall - Helly Hansen Buoyancy Aids

The UK Government has issued a product recall notice relating to Helly Hansen AS Buoyancy Aids. The recall notice can be found here [Product Recall: Helly Hansen AS Buoyancy Aids \(2605-0143\) - GOV.UK](#). If you or your club uses Helly Hansen AS Buoyancy Aids, then please check the product recall notice.

Safety provision at a regatta in Belgium

Last month I described an incident in which a British sculler entered the water to save the life of another sculler and noted that I had written the following to World Rowing about the safety provision at this competition.

I understand that there was only one safety boat at the event and, at that time, this was assisting a rower at the start of the race. I also understand that the Event Medical Officer was a Psychiatrist who may not have had the skills and equipment needed to deliver the medical support required.

The response was that this regatta is not sanctioned by World Rowing, so we cannot have direct involvement. As the importance of safety on water and at our events is paramount for World Rowing, the Water Safety Working Group is continuously working on improving policies and procedures in that area.

Water Contamination

I have just been notified that of the current poor water quality in the Tidal Thames.

There have been several sewage discharges and

Following Monday's storm in London, multiple Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs) discharged into the Thames during the early hours of Tuesday. This included Hammersmith Pumping Station, which discharged for four hours, and Acton Storm Drain, which discharged for 12 minutes. Both are connected to the Tideway Tunnel and would not ordinarily be expected to discharge into the river!

There is UK wide information on sewage discharges in England and Scotland here [Sewage Map](#)

A recent measurement showed that the E. coli level was 58,000 cfu per 100ml — one of the highest E.coli readings that this club has recorded to date. For context, based on 74 samples collected since September 2024 the average E. coli reading is 4,786 cfu per 100ml, with a minimum of 64 and a maximum of 100,000 cfu per 100ml. DEFRA's bathing water framework classifies levels above 1,000 cfu per 100ml as poor water quality for swimming.

We have [Guidance for Rowing when the water quality is poor](#).

Please use the sewage map to check the discharges in your area and take action accordingly. Encourage all river users to wash their hands, boats, and equipment after use.

Antisocial behaviour

There was a request for support from a club that had experienced a couple of incidents in recent weeks of persons on the Riverbank throwing or catapulting objects at young rowers. The club has, quite correctly, contacted the local Police.

The response was that the advice in Section 9.2 of [RowSafe](#) is: -

Hazard	Barriers (to reduce the probability)	Hazardous Events	Controls (to reduce the severity of harm)
Presence of people on the water intending to inconvenience or harm rowers	• Operate a Buddy system with other rowers • Share information about anti-social events and their location • Avoid areas where anti-social behaviour is likely to happen • Have coaches in launches rather than on the bank.	Distress or harm to rowers and coaches (caused by inappropriate or suggestive speech, excessive wash, obstruction, etc.,)	• 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 (see notes on Mental Health above). • Provide First Aid, etc, to anyone injured.
Presence of people on land intending to inconvenience or harm rowers	• Operate a Buddy system with other rowers • Share information about anti-social events and their location • Avoid areas where anti-social behaviour is likely to happen • Avoid rowing under bridges where people congregate. • Try to move out of the range of people throwing objects • Have coaches in launches rather than on the bank.	Distress or harm to rowers and coaches (caused by inappropriate or suggestive speech, thrown or dropped objects, indecent exposure, etc.,)	• 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 (see notes on Mental Health above). • Provide First Aid, etc, to anyone injured.

We also have a Safety Alert, "Coping with the behaviour of others". Safety Alerts can be found here: [-Safety Alerts - British Rowing](#).

Insurance

There was a request for information about insurance. The request was if there is an incident on the water involving a club boat should the insurance claim be coming to the club directly or ought it to be sent to the rowers involved in the incident?

The response was that if the incident causes injury to a rower, then that will be covered by their Personal Accident cover provided as part of their membership of British Rowing. If the damage is caused to a boat, then that is a matter for the club's insurers. If it is a privately owned boat, then it is a matter for the owners insurance.

The need for rowers to wear personal floatation devices

I was asked by a parent of a junior rower whether they need to wear a buoyancy aid. They row on a tidal river, and the parent was concerned that they are not wearing any kind of buoyancy aid. There was no preparation for entering the water or conversation around the risks of cold-water shock.

The response was that this is difficult because it all depends on the individual circumstances of the club. We do not have requirements for rowers, other than coxes, to wear lifejackets or buoyancy aids.

In what we have chosen to call Classic Rowing (in fine boats), at most venues, for most people, lifejackets are not needed. Rowers are expected to be able to float and, if they capsize, they are expected to float and stay with their boat, using their boat as their life raft. The boats have ample buoyancy to support them. This is not the case with gig rowing so if your club uses gigs or similar boats then please let me know and I will explain why.

[RowSafe](#) contains the following: -

Club

Club Officers are expected to:

- *Record the swimming or floating ability of each member of the club and make this available to all its coaches.*
- *Promote a higher level of care for junior, beginner and adaptive rowers.*
- *Have policies in place for those who cannot, or who have not demonstrated or declared, swimming or floating competence, particularly junior, beginner and adaptive rowers.*
- *Reconfirm the swimming or floating ability of all members at appropriate intervals.*
- ***Make lifejackets and buoyancy aids available to all rowers and ensure that they are worn by those not able to swim or float.***
- ***Determine whether lifejackets or buoyancy aids should be worn by juniors who have not completed a capsize drill based on a risk assessment that includes the circumstances and their ability.***

(see section 3.6, Competence in the water)

The simple logic here is that if a rower, or their parent if they are a junior, chooses to use a lifejacket then we would expect the club to provide one.

One of our problems is that there is a tremendous variation in rowing venues. We have clubs that row on canals, lakes, rivers, river estuaries, coasts close to the shore and on the open sea. Each club is expected to complete a risk assessment, based on the hazards present at its venue, and develop its own safety rules and safety plan. One size does not fit all.

RowSafe also contains the following: -

Club

Club Officers are expected to:

- ***Ensure that all members know what to do in the event of capsize or swamping.***

- **Ensure that all members are aware of the effects of cold-water shock and hypothermia, described in the Cold Water and Hypothermia online module and the Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills.**
- **Promote a higher level of duty of care for junior, beginner and adaptive rowers.**
- *Have policies in place for those who have not been trained, particularly junior, beginner and adaptive rowers. These could, for example, require the wearing of lifejackets or buoyancy aids.*
- *Record Capsize and Recovery training of each member of the club and make these records available to all its coaches.*
- *Complete the Capsize Training for Coaches and Club Officials online learning module.*

(see Section 3.7 Capsize and recovery)

This contains the following links to further information: -

- Cold Water and Hypothermia online module - <https://www.rowhow.org/course/view.php?id=165>
- Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills - <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-Cold-Water-Kills-1.pdf>
- Capsize Training for Coaches and Club Officials - <https://www.rowhow.org/mod/book/view.php?id=6273>

Safety Innovation Competition

Last month I described the KNRB initiative to have a Safety Innovation Competition. This has been discussed with colleagues, and we have decided to hold our own competition later in the year. Everyone is currently busy with racing, and we thought that members of the rowing community would have more time to consider this once the competition season is over.

How to rescue a person in the water

I was asked “What would be a safe and useful technique for a rower to support a struggling swimmer?” The response was that this is a real issue, there have been two rescues by rowers of people who may well otherwise have drowned in the last two days. The warm weather and the cold water at this time of year are a deadly combination.

The advice from the Royal Life Saving Society (see [How to rescue someone from drowning](#)) is that rescuers should not enter the water. They should call for help (e.g. 999) and then throw the casualty something for them to hang onto to help them float. This could be a Lifering (if one is available nearby) or even a football. Coaches can use their throwlines to help recover a person from the water.

Rowers may be able to use their boats. An incident where they did so is described in the first item in this report.

The problem that is difficult to talk about is that a person who thinks that they are about to drown will do anything to stay alive. They will even try to climb on top of the person rescuing them. It can be dangerous to approach a drowning person.

Many years ago (in the late 1960s) I had a holiday job at the local swimming pool. We were taught lifesaving skills. This included how to approach a person in distress in the water and take hold of them so that they could be rescued. This can be summarised as “approach underwater from behind”. We also learned how to restrain people if they struggled and how to break their grip if they tried to hold onto you. None of this is very nice.

The modern approach is that if there is a rescuer in the water then they should approach holding a long float. The rescuer keeps hold of one end and pushes the other end towards the casualty so that they can grab it and be towed to safety.

All that being said, on many occasions, rowers have entered the water to save a life. Sometimes the casualty is no longer in a condition to “fight”, they may well be cold and exhausted. If they are placid or not fully conscious, then it may be possible to tow them to safety. If they are calm, then it may be possible to put your boat in a position where they can use it to keep themselves afloat while you take them to safety or wait for a launch to arrive.

Rowing boats float and can become a person's liferaft. If the casualty and rescuer are both in the water, and nobody is panicking, then it may be possible to keep the casualty's head above the water by positioning them close to the boat and facing the boat while the rescuer is behind them and passes their arms under the casualty's armpits and holds onto the boat.

The basic rule of rescue is not to let yourself become a casualty. If that happens then you can no longer assist anyone. Please do not encourage anyone to be brave.

Adrenaline Auto-Injectors

There was a request for information on the need for clubs to stock Adrenaline Auto-Injectors (AAIs, also known as EpiPens) for use in severe anaphylaxis. This follows a government requirement, coming into effect in September, for them to be stocked in schools and for teachers to be trained to use them. There is more information here [Stronger protections for children with allergies in school - GOV.UK](#). AAIs are used as a short term, lifesaving treatment for people with allergies who suffer Anaphylaxis.

In my view it is not appropriate for clubs to provide AAIs to supplement those carried by their members. This is unlikely to be required by regulation and unless it is then it would not be possible for clubs to obtain AAIs.

Adrenaline Auto-Injectors contain a Prescription-Only Medicine (POM). Specific rules apply to how an AAI can be obtained in the UK, they are: -

- **Personal Prescription:** You must have a prescription from your GP, an allergy specialist, or a registered online prescribing service. Online pharmacies can issue a prescription if you complete a medical questionnaire and their clinical team approves it.
- **For Schools:** UK legislation allows schools to purchase and stock generic "spare" AAIs without a specific prescription for emergency use. Presumably, the arrangements made for schools will extend to school rowing clubs.
- **For Businesses:** Qualifying businesses with an occupational health scheme can buy devices without a prescription, provided the order is placed by or signed for by a qualified healthcare professional.

If you need an AAI for personal use, you should consult your GP for an assessment. If you have been prescribed one in the past and need a replacement, you can request a repeat prescription from your doctor or use a [Boots Online Doctor](#) or [LloydsPharmacy Online Doctor](#) service.

The AAI should be carried by the person likely to need it as they will know when it is needed. AAIs are for 'personal' use and in the majority of cases the individual suffering the anaphylaxis will be able to administer their AAI themselves. However, occasionally, administration may be delayed, and a third party may be required to administer the AAI to prevent the anaphylaxis progressing. If that individual is in a crew boat, then it may be prudent to train other rowers in the boat in its use. The primary AAI should **not** be carried by the coach although spare AAIs, if available, can be. It is recommended that there should be two AAIs available (it is often necessary to administer two doses to effectively treat the anaphylaxis).

If they become available then it may be prudent to have a backup AAI as the effect is time limited and a further injection can be provided, if necessary, five minutes after the first injection. In the rowing context then a club should consider, in their circumstances, at their venue, who should carry the backup AAI. If the coach is likely to be nearby in a launch, then it could be them. If the coach is some distance away on the bank, then consider having a backup AAI in the boat. The actions to take if a rower needs an AAI should be planned in advance and relevant people should be informed. This should include calling 999 and taking the casualty ashore, to the nearest landing site, to await the ambulance.

There are various types of AAI, and the coach should know how to use the type that they have.

Most people who are likely to need an AAI will be aware that they may need it. They, and their parents, become experts on their condition. Please listen to them. It is reasonable to expect people who may need this support to share information with their coaches and their club. Most users will carry two AAIs with them and will self-administer if possible.

There is more information in section 8.6.4 of [RowSafe](#).

There is further relevant information on the NHS website here [Anaphylaxis - NHS](#). This includes: -

- Symptoms (identification)
- What to do if you have anaphylaxis
- Treatments
- Prevention and
- Causes (Triggers)

There are also St John Ambulance videos here

- [First Aid Facts: Anaphylaxis | St John WA](#)
- [Allergies - Animated](#)

There are a few other considerations.

- EpiPens and AAIs have short term effects. You may need more than one. Typically, the effect lasts for about five minutes.
- If one is used, then you **MUST** call an ambulance or obtain proper medical care for the casualty.
- The shelf life of AAIs is about 12 to 24 months; the expiry date is stamped on the device.
- The cost is about £100 to £160 for two AAIs if they are obtained without using a prescription.

We have a friend who is the mother of young rowers with allergies and who carried AAIs. She has offered to share her experiences. Please let me know (safety@britishrowing.org) if you if you would like to contact her.