



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

July 2026

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Awards for Rowers

Sven Friedemann of the City of Bristol RC was presented with a Combined Testimonial on Parchment and Resuscitation Certificate for Bravery and Resuscitation by CEO Tom Solesbury at the British Rowing Club Championships. There is more information here [Sven Friedemann awarded a Royal Humane Society Award - British Rowing](#).

In July, the Royal Humane Society conferred the following awards: -

Adam (15) and Adrius (15) of Lea Rowing Club were each awarded Resuscitation Certificates for saving the life of an unknown man. There is more information here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-May-2026.pdf](#).

James Rudkin of Tideway Scullers School was awarded a Testimonial on Parchment and Wilana Richards was awarded a Certificate of Commendation for saving the life of a sculler at Ghent Regatta. There is more information here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-May-2026.pdf](#).

A spreadsheet showing the awards and nominations accompanies this report. The names of children do not appear in full to protect their identity. Only their first names and ages at the time of the event are included.

Many of the rescues were of people who entered the water in order to take their own lives. This is becoming increasingly common, and the Royal Humane Society secretary tells me that many of their nominations involve the saving of lives in these circumstances. Two of the lives saved by rowers involved intercepting people who had just entered the water or were about to enter the water. There is more information on how to support someone who is contemplating taking their own life here [Safety-Alert-Small-Talk-Saves-Lives.pdf](#).

British Rowing is now the second largest nominator of Royal Humane Society Awards. The largest by far is the Police.

On a personal note, I am proud of the behaviour of these rowers, as I think that we all can be. They all found themselves in stressful situations, not of their own making, and behaved with a combination of skill and resolve. I once said, when presenting an award, that ...

Rowing is a sport that is highly technical and intensely physical. It attracts and develops people who are resilient, determined, and persistent. They learn to work together to achieve their aims. Rowers simply do not give up. These traits help in later life too.

Climate Change Adaptations

The last few weeks has shown us that climate change is real and unless we find ways to adapt it will impact on the safety of rowers. There are different impacts in each season. The greater than normal rainfall in autumn, winter and spring resulted in clubs that row on inland rivers experiencing such high flow rates that they were not been able to go afloat from their own boathouses. Storms have also caused significant disruption. And then we have had the heatwaves of the of the last few weeks. Met Office information shows that there may be more heatwaves to come.

Adapting to high rainfall and high river flow rates is far from easy but some clubs have arranged to use the facilities of other clubs who row on canals or to arrange rowing camps on lakes.

In July the Met Office issued the following information [Climate extremes are becoming the new 'normal' for the UK - Met Office](#). I do not think that there is any doubt that we can expect recurrences of the recent weather patterns. This report contains the following: -

“Every year is adding to the body of evidence showing climate change in the UK. We are right now living in a time of historic and unprecedented change and in terms of temperature, on annual, seasonal and daily timescales, this evidence shows the climate of the 20th century has now gone.”

Global climate change is real, and it is not going to go away. We have had reports of people becoming ill at competitions due to the elevated temperatures.

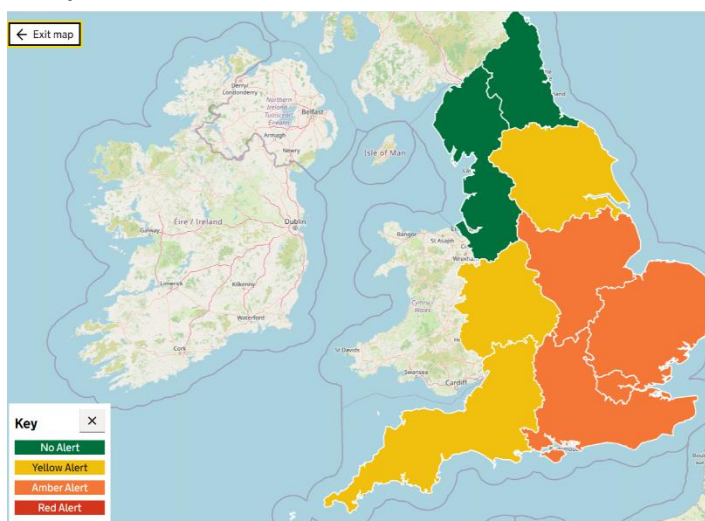
We have recently issued a [Safety-Alert-Heat-Illness-at-Competitions](#). This is a quick, simple, pragmatic set of basic ideas for Competition Organisers. It includes advice to provide shade, drinking water, ice in insulated boxes to treat heat illness, a cool area for people affected by the heat and keeping people out of the sun. These ideas can also be used by clubs to protect their members.

The new Safety Alert complements the previously issued [Safety-Alert-Avoiding-and-Treating-Heat-Exhaustion](#) and [Safety-Alert-How-to-stay-safe-whilst-rowing-in-the-sun](#).

World Rowing has guidance here [HEAT FISA](#). This uses Wet Bulb Globe Temperature as this measurement effectively takes humidity and air movement into account.

If you need information on weather warnings, then check [Weather health alerts | UKHSA data dashboard](#). The information for 29th July is shown opposite: -

Prolonged droughts can also cause river levels to be low and there have been several reports of boats having collisions because they were avoiding shallows, running aground, hitting underwater objects or having difficulty when landing.



Incidents Reported in July

Take care to check your boats

It is important to check all parts of the boat prior to use. In one incident a rower in a 1x capsized because the collar detached from a sculling blade. In another incident a 2- capsized because a gate opened and an oar was released.

In yet another incident a rower in a 1x capsized and the footplate came free from the boat but the rowers feet remained in the shoes. This made swimming difficult.

A rower capsized from a 1x and had problems releasing their shoes. Club members have been asked to double check heel restrains and shoe release before going out.

In another incident, a rower grazed their thigh on a protruding rigger bolt. In another incident a sharp piece of metal protruding from a rigger caused a cut to the bone in a rower's shin. These are additional features to check.

In yet another incident a rower capsized, and water entered the stern compartment causing the boat to become unrowable. The hatch cover was missing. Please include hatch covers when checking boats prior to use.

Take care to check your trailer

The rear extension bar of a trailer (the one that supports the light board) was partially dragging on the road surface. A previous user of the trailer had adjusted the bar but had not adequately secured it. One leg had extended out of the socket and was dragging on the road.

Please check your trailer for yourself before you start to tow it.

Take care to check your launch

A launch filled up with water due to a hole. A coach tried to get back to the boathouse, but it filled and submerged. The coaches were rescued by colleagues who also towed the submerged launch back to the boathouse. The launch has been destroyed as it had to be broken up in order to get it out of the water. The engine probably will not be salvageable.

Please check your launch each time before you use it.

Take care when driving a launch

A launch approached a landing stage to drop off a passenger. As it did so the driver put on a burst of power to bring the launch alongside but did not warn the passenger. The passenger, who was standing lost balance and fell into the water. Their auto inflation lifejacket deployed, and the passenger was recovered wet but uninjured.

If you are driving, then always take care to communicate your intentions to your passengers.

Take care to check your lifejacket

A rower in a 1x collided and then their blade being wrenched out of its gate caused the rower to capsize. A launch came to their rescue with a spare lifejacket. The rower was recovered into the launch, but the lifejacket crotch strap was tied up and unusable.

In another incident a cox was seen not to have their lifejacket adjusted correctly.

Another incident related to a Control Commission check where it was found that a Lifejacket was not being correctly worn. At another competition 27 Lifejackets were inspected and ten were found to be faulty. There is information on checking lifejackets at [Safety-Alert-check-your-lifejacket](#). Please check the lifejacket that you use.

There is information on the correct adjustment of lifejacket chest straps and crotch straps in the [Safety-Alert-Take-care-to-fit-your-lifejacket](#). A copy will be included with this report.

Please remember that lifejackets do not last forever. Section 7.3 of [RowSafe](#) includes “*The time after which lifejackets expire depends on their type and usage: foam life jackets typically have a lifespan of 10 years for leisure purposes, while an inflatable lifejacket lifespan is around 5 - 8 years depending on its usage.*”

In another incident, I disqualified a 4x+ because the cox was not wearing a lifejacket.

Please look out for swimmers

It is that time of year again when people take to the water to swim. Please encourage rowers to keep a good lookout for them. There were at least four incidents this month involving swimmers.

Take extra care around Dove Pier (Hammersmith)

A 2x was instructed to spin well before Dove Pier. They failed to do so and started chatting. The stream pushed them in between two boats at Dove Pier. They then capsized. The rowers held on to their boats until they, and their boat, were rescued by a coaching launch.

Dove Pier is dangerous to rowers see [Dove Pier LESSONS FOR ROWERS](#).

Take care on bends

There have been ten reports of collisions and near misses on bends. In many cases crews steered wide round a bend and had a head on collision, or near miss, with crews travelling in the opposite direction. Please take care when steering round bends and keep a good lookout. Please try to avoid overtaking on bends.

Anti-social behaviour

It is that time of year, and weather, when we expect this type of behaviour. At least six incidents were reported together with one case of theft of riggers from a parked trailer.

Please remember: -

- Don't REACT
- REMOVE yourself from the situation
- REPORT to the Navigation Authority, Police, British Rowing, etc.

Athletic Hijabs

The question was simply “is it safe for a rower to wear an athletic hijab”. There was some concern because we discourage the use of hoodies and hijabs share some of the characteristics of hoodies.



We need to address this issue if rowing is to become a yet more diverse and inclusive sport. This is consistent with our [Equity Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#).

This person asking has been speaking with a rowing kit manufacturer who is interested in the development of inclusive rowing apparel, including athletic hijabs. They are enthusiastic about the idea but are keen to understand any health and safety considerations.

Statements like this appear in four sections of [RowSafe](#): -

3.2. Club Safety Plans and Safety Rules

Rules could include:

- *Not wear Dryrobes, denims, jeans or heavy cotton clothing at any time when afloat.*
- *Not wear a hoodie when rowing or sculling as the thumbs tend to catch in the pocket, or when coxing in a bow-loader as it could become entangled and impede a rapid exit.*

There is also an issue with the hood. Scullers wearing hoodies have been known to look over their shoulders only to see the inside of their hoods! Another problem with hoodies is the material they are made from, particularly if it gets wet.

As far as I can tell none of this applies to athletic hijabs. It helps if the rowing kit (all in one, or vest) is worn over the hijab simply to stop it from flapping about, other than that I can see no objection on safety or any other grounds to rowers wearing athletic hijabs.

The writer is keen for us to pursue this idea. If you have any suggestions, then please let me know. (please write to safety@britishrowing.org).

Competence of Launch Drivers

There was a request to confirm the level of launch driver training which British Rowing advises for coaches and safety launch drivers on non-tidal Environment Agency (EA) waters. It was thought that the guidance in [RowSafe](#) was a bit contradictory as it seems to suggest the RYA Level 2 training both is and isn't necessary. The EA guidance refers back to British Rowing!

The club has some people who have the RYA certification (though courses are hard to find and expensive and take two days of volunteers' time), but they need more launch drivers for their expanded squad.

They are proposing to ask a contact who is qualified to teach the courses (including both the Level 2 Powerboat course and the additional training on how to rescue a sculler using a launch) but this will not be a certified course. The club will keep a written record of this training and asks whether this will be sufficient to satisfy British Rowing's guidance in the event of an incident.

The response was that there are lots of issues here. The first is the difference between qualification and competence. We need launch drivers to be competent; this is not guaranteed by their qualifications. There are lots of problems with RYA Level 2 Powerboat qualification, one is that it lasts a lifetime. Somebody who qualified 40 years ago will still be qualified even if they have never driven a powerboat since.

We also have to be careful to consider what skills are needed at the location where this person will drive. The launch driver should be competent to operate this particular launch at this particular location. RYA Level 2 Powerboat does not help with this because it covers topics that are not relevant at some locations and does not cover topics that are relevant at others.

The comments on the cost and time are valid.

The idea expressed in RowSafe is that each club should determine the skills or competencies that launch drivers should have at that club's venue. This club's approach focusses on training to develop competence rather than to achieve a qualification seems admirable and very sensible.

Replacement for foil blankets

There was a question relating to the use of foil blankets. The response was that we no longer recommend foil blankets in [RowSafe](#). This was removed some years ago. We now recommend Emergency Safety Ponchos in section 7.4.1 on Launch Safety Kits.

They are made from a material similar to that used in space blankets, but they are easier to keep in place and do not need to be held close to the skin. They are quick to put on. They protect people from the wind without those people having to wrap their arms into the blanket.



Too Old to Row?

I was asked again for advice on the safety of ageing rowers. There are some concerns at a club as these rowers now have to use stable boats that are heavy and that have to be lifted for launch and recovery.

I replied by referring to the item in the [June Monthly Report](#) and subsequently added age is a "protected characteristic" as specified in the Equality Act 2010. It would be illegal to treat someone less favourably just because of their age. Therefore, the club cannot impose constraints based solely on age.

Older people are, by definition, adults and, unless they have mental capacity issues, are capable of making their own decisions and being responsible for the consequences of those decisions.

The club may be able to start quiet conversations with individuals about their physical capacity to row but many older people are as fit as others 30 years younger. The club may also suggest, but not demand, that they confine their rowing to the quiet area of water near the clubhouse.

Routine social exercise keeps older people physically fit and can contribute massively to their mental health. If the club denies them this then it would not be surprising to see a rapid deterioration in their condition.

The challenge we all face is how can we provide safe ways for people to enjoy the sport rather than tell them that they cannot row.

As they row in crew boats it should be possible, in the event of a rower being unable to continue, for the remainder of the crew to take the boat to a place of safety. The club could suggest that each crew carries a mobile phone in a waterproof case so that they are able to call for assistance.

Carrying boats may be a concern but if two, or more, boats are going afloat then more than four people can carry each boat.

Please consider how the club can make this activity safe.

Buoyancy Aid Product Recall

My colleague at Paddle UK has kindly shared information about the recall of the "JOYHUT Life Jacket". This is actually a buoyancy aid and is shown opposite.

There is further information here [Product Safety Report: JOYHUT Life Jacket - GOV.UK](#) and here [product-safety-report-joyhut-life-jacket](#). There is also information on the PaddleUK website here [JOYHUT Life Jacket | Paddle UK](#).



Lifejackets or Buoyancy Aids for Coxes

There was an enquiry that contained the following questions: -

- A) Should all coxes always have inflatable life jackets? (The club tends to buy manual inflate so there is no chance a cox in a bow loader grabs the wrong type from the rack). Can we still use buoyancy aids?
- B) Must launch drivers and crew all have automatic inflate jackets? (I have heard that during recovery of capsizes these can go off when reaching over the side). I can see the argument for lone drivers without crew.

The response was that I personally prefer inflatable lifejackets over buoyancy aids for rowers, coaches, launch drivers, coxes, etc. because they generally provide greater buoyancy and will keep an unconscious casualty's face above the water.

However, it is up to each club to determine what suits their members best, based on the type of rowing that they do and the venue where they row. This decision should be informed by the club's Risk Assessment.

It is important that the club chooses the product that works for them and ensures that it is worn. The cox of a bow loaded boat should wear a manual inflation lifejacket and not an auto-inflation one or a buoyancy aid.

How to manage a sculler with their own boat

A club captain wrote to seek advice as a J14 junior has acquired a single for their own use and, since he and they live close to the boathouse, they were wondering if he would be allowed to go afloat other than at regular club sessions. The club has two weekend morning sessions and a mid-week early morning session, but they cannot commit to more than that as they do not have any paid coaches. Most members live a considerable distance from the club.

The club specifies that adult members may use their own boats if they operate a "buddy" system and comply with the club safety protocol. They have never had a junior sculler that had their own equipment and wanted to use it outside of the regular, organised sessions.

The junior's father is happy to accompany him out on the water, in a canoe. If the club could limit the outing to a section of the river where the father could, from his canoe, keep an eye on the junior sculler, would that be enough?

The response was that is a matter for the club, British Rowing does not have an official safety position. It all depends on the conditions and hazards at the venue where the club rows, one size does not fit all. The club should use its risk assessment to inform its judgement. Each member of a rowing club should be expected to comply with the club rules. It does not matter who owns the boat that they are using.

The [British Rowing Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy 2026](#) refers to a “*child-centred environment free from abuse, neglect, bullying, exploitation, discrimination, harassment and poor practice.*” It is not good practice to leave children alone or to put them in a position where they may have to assist an adult.

As far as the buddy system is concerned, we can expect an adult to rescue a junior, but we cannot expect a junior to rescue an adult. The idea of the father using a kayak is problematic as the sculling boat will probably be much faster and the kayaker may not be able to keep up. Proximity is an important part of the buddy system.

Suggested additions to Launch Safety Kits

It was suggested that the section 7.4.1 of [RowSafe](#) should be extended to include: -

1. Add a boat hook; if someone in the launch wants to take hold of a boat, floating in the water close by, having a simple hook avoids the crew member having to lean out, possibly falling in. It can also be used to take hold of a casualty on the same basis.
2. Instead of having survival equipment and lifejackets for "the maximum number of passengers and crew", why not for the maximum number of athletes in the boat being coached? If an eight gets into difficulties all nine aren't going to get onto the average club launch, so throwing a lifejacket to those still in the water would be helpful.

The response was that it has been some time since we looked at this section of [RowSafe](#).

There is a balance to be maintained here. We do not want to burden launches with so much kit that there is no room for the people who are rescued. However, we do want launches to contain the equipment that they will need. Much of this is venue specific.

The purpose of a launch when rescuing is often to "scoop and shoot" or collect people from in the water and take them to a place of safety as quickly as possible. A boat hook would certainly help but a throw line takes up much less space.

I am not so sure about asking people in the water to put on a lifejacket and this could itself prove difficult. They are usually able to use their boat as their liferaft. If there are many people in the water, then the best option may be for them to climb or cling onto their boat and the boat to be towed to a place of safety. Having an emergency poncho each may help.

It is always helpful to have suggestions for improvement. Please help us by making suggestions. The next review of [RowSafe](#) will take place early in 2027. Please write to safety@britishrowing.org.