



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

August 2026

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Rowers work together to save the life of a jogger

A member of the public, accompanied by his wife, was jogging past a rowing club when he collapsed. The wife's screams alerted members of the club.

One member, who is an off-duty Intensive Care Consultant, went to the assistance of the casualty and diagnosed him as not breathing and having no pulse. The doctor started chest compressions. As the doctor was assessing the casualty, another club member dialled 999 and fetched the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) from the front of the club. Someone else from the club then joined them and attached the pads to the casualty's chest. The club member liaised with the 999 operator and guided the emergency services to the scene. Successful resuscitation often requires a team effort.

The AED was used successfully, and the casualty was handed over to the paramedics with breathing and pulse restored.

These three people have been nominated for Royal Humane Society Awards. The club should also be congratulated for having a well-maintained AED ready for immediate use. Please take care to ensure that your club's AED is kept ready for immediate use. Please also ensure that your members know where it is and how and when to use it.

Please ensure that you regularly check the battery (there is an indicator light or display on the front of most AEDs) and, if necessary, replace the battery (normal AED battery life is about 3-5 years, if not used). Also check that the pads are in date; if not they are not in date, or the pack has been opened, then they will also need replacing (normal pad life 2-3 years).

If your club relies on a public access AED, then please understand that doing so is only justified if it is very close by and can be brought to a casualty within a minute or so. Delays in using the AED can significantly reduce the probability of a successful outcome.

If yours is one of the very few clubs that does not have an AED, or does not have access to one close nearby, then please consider acquiring one. Financial support is available from the [Robert Allen, Life Promotion & Health Hearts Trust](#) (RALPHH).

A Rower in Scotland rescues a person from the water

A rower in a 1x spotted a person in the water and approached this person to ask whether they needed help. At first, they were unresponsive, glassy-eyed and not moving while floating on their back with their mouth and nose above the water and audibly breathing. Members of the public on the bank contacted emergency services and the rower stayed near the person in the water. A few minutes later, the person began to move, climbed onto the stern of the 1x, and was able to communicate. The police arrived at the bank, and the rower backed the 1x towards the bank. The police pulled the person onto the bank.

Award Presentations at Maidenhead

Sharon Mower, George Foot, and Jo Stringer have been awarded Royal Humane Society Certificates of Commendation for working together to save the life of a woman.



I presented the awards to Sharon Mower, George Foot and Jo Stringer, with Maidenhead Rowing Club President Laura Lion. There is more information here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-March-2026.pdf](#).

Please find an explanation of why we nominate rowers for awards in [Appendix I](#).

Incidents reported in August

Notify the Police of serious anti-social behaviour

The driver of a pleasure cruiser became verbally aggressive towards a group of rowers in Ixs. The driver then drove at them and, even though the rowers took avoiding action there were collisions. The driver was angry, shouting profanities and threats at the rowers.

The identity of the boat was noted, and the Police were notified and attended. The boat returned to its mooring, but the driver left the scene before the Police arrived.

The driver was subsequently detected and detained by the Police who have confirmed that the driver has been arrested on suspicion of criminal damage, threats to kill, common assault, and using a watercraft in a manner that endangered a structure or individual.

If you encounter behaviour anything like this then please notify the Police immediately.

Check your boat

Whatever type of boat you use, please take care to check it before you go afloat. This will help to prevent incidents like these: -

- A coach noticed that the launch was sitting low in the water and found that the bung was missing and it was taking on water. The coach fitted a spare bung and prevented the launch from sinking.
- A rower in a 1x capsized because their gate was not correctly closed and an oar was released.
- A gate detached from a rigger due to a top nut being loose causing a 2- to capsize.
- After rowing the length of the reservoir in a 4-, a top nut came undone and the gate came off the top of the pin.
- A rail supporting a sliding seat moved during a race causing cuts to the rower's calf.
- A 2x capsized and a rower lost their phone. It was in a waterproof cover, but this was not attached to the boat.

There is some better news. The heel restraints of all 62 boats at a competition were checked and only two faults were found. One heel restraint was broken and the other was missing.

Please check your boat before every outing.

Take care around people fishing

There were several incidents associated with people fishing. These include: -

- The oar of a rower in a 1x caught in fishing line leading to capsize.
- A line was cast and a fishing hook became stuck in the back of a rower in an 8+. The rower was taken to the hospital for treatment and the removal of the fishing hook.
- A rower in a 1x rowing became entangled in the fishing line and capsized.
- A rower in a 4x had a fishing hook embedded in the wrist. The hook was removed by the NHS.

Please take care when rowing near people fishing.

Trees

There were several incidents involving trees. Low water levels contributed to some of these incidents (see below). Also, please see the item on clearing trees and bushes, below.

- Without warning and in still conditions, a 6m high tree fell and partially obstructed a racing lane during a competition. No boats were nearby.
- A 4- was completing a practice race piece and collided with a fallen tree that was partially submerged in the river. The collision caused significant damage to the boat.
- Rowers in a 2x struck a large, completely submerged tree branch close to the riverbank damaging the underside of their hull. The location of the branch was shared with other rowers.
- Rowers in a 2x crossed to the far side of the river to avoid a fallen tree in the water. As the 2x was moving back to the correct station it collided with a 1x travelling in the opposite direction causing it to capsize. The sun was low and the bow person did not see the oncoming 1x.

Trailer incidents

There were several incidents involving trailers: -

- While driving down a narrow road the top level of the trailer caught the branches and the frame was bent.
- The rear of a trailer and a 4x hit a tree when turning sharply. The 4x was damaged, perhaps beyond repair.
- Trailer light board came loose (nut missing from bolt) and dragged on road. A temporary fix was made at the roadside.
- The straps came loose and a 2x fell from the trailer. It is suspected that this was due to failure of a buckle or that UV light over the previous days had weakened the webbing.

Please see the item on trailers below.

Wash

Wash from five large motorboats, in a narrow section of river, caused water to enter two 4xs, one of which was swamped. One boat was able to continue after stopping to empty the water. The crew of the other boat were rescued by their coach, and with the aid of some paddle boarders, the coach was able to recover the boat from a tree. The incident was reported to the Navigation authority.

In another incident the wash from a group of six motorboats swamped a 4x. The incident was reported to the Navigation authority.

In another incident a speed boat was driven at high speed past the boating areas of a rowing club and a canoe club (they are opposite sides of the river), while crews from both clubs were boating causing a huge wash. This caused rowers to stop and wait for the wash to subside and a kayaker to capsize. The incident was reported to the Navigation authority.

If you do witness dangerous behaviour of other water users, then please note the boat name or number and report the incident to the appropriate Navigation Authority.

Rowing in hot weather

A rower in a 1x became fatigued when rowing in the middle of a day that was very warm and still. They became entangled in a bush and ran out of energy when trying to extract themselves. They were recovered into the safety launch and taken back to their club. The rower appeared to have fully recovered after 10 - 15 minutes and having drunk some water.

In another incident a rower became ill after racing on a particularly hot day despite them being in shade when off the water,

Please take care to avoid outings in the middle of the day when the weather is hot.

Antisocial behaviour

I hope that we are approaching the end of “antisocial behaviour season” for this year but please take care and follow the guidance below.

- Rowers in a 2- encountered a narrow boat whose driver shouted, swore, and verbally threatened the crew. The crew did not respond. It was later found that two other rowers from the same club had encountered this boat further upriver. One rower told the driver to slow down as he was going too fast; this resulted in a rude response. Another rower had to perform an emergency stop and take avoiding action.
- A small hired powered boat was weaving across the river and steered into an 8+.
- The crew of a 2x was doing a very slow, arms-only drill and were barely moving and noticed a hired motorboat ahead. The crew shouted a warning, but the motorboat collided with, and damaged, a carbon wing rigger.
- A rower in a 1x was hit by a canal boat that had cut across onto the wrong side of the waterway. The number of the boat was recorded, and the incident was reported to the navigation authority.
- An electric hire boat driven was oversteering travelling from bank to bank. It collided with a 1x that was in the middle of the river. The adult then screamed hysterically and shouted, “I don't know what I am doing!”
- The cox of a 4x+ noticed a hired electric leisure boat approaching steering in a zigzag. The boat was steered by a child of around seven to nine years of age. The crew of the 4x+ had to pull the blades in to avoid them going under the electric boat.
- A 2x was slowly proceeding downstream and a hired motorboat was moving upstream. The 2x held it up and was stationary. A coach shouted to the motorboat to stop their boat. They shouted back “We don't know how to do that”. The motorboat hit the bows of the 2x, pushing it upstream about 10 metres forcing the 2x round 180 degrees before it freed itself.

In another incident the coach of a junior 4x was on the towpath and noticed 2 boys on the bridge behaving suspiciously. As the boat passed under the bridge, one of the boys drop an object (like a wheel or tyre around 30 cm diameter) as the boat was passing under. The coach cycled up over the bridge and caught up the boys. He told them that what they had done was an assault and a criminal offence. They initially denied that they had done anything but later apologised. The incident was reported to the Police.

In general, it is not advisable to confront people who exhibit anti-social behaviour. Please take care if you choose to do so.

The general 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.

It helps to work with others

A coach driving a launch noticed that a kayak had capsized, perhaps due to the wash from the coaching launch. The coach is aware of [Guidance-for-Rowers-and-Paddlers.pdf](#). The coach is also the Club Rowing Safety Advisor and plans to meet with the Safety Advisor of the canoe club so that both clubs can gain a better understanding to reduce the likelihood of such incidents occurring in the future.

Please look after your bikes

An elderly member was in a hurry to take a tool to a work party on the riverside path. They grabbed a coaching bike. When the member tried to alight from the saddle they caught their clothing on the saddle. The saddle was too high. The member fell onto a protruding tree branch and broke five ribs leading to an emergency hospital admission and weeks of painful recuperation.

All the bikes have now been fitted with quick release saddle stem clamps and a notice issued advising users to have the saddle lower than normal for safety on the uneven path. Bikes are maintained and regularly checked.

Please take care to look after your club's bikes

Clearing trees and bushes

If you are concerned about overhanging trees or bushes impeding the waterway and the owners and the navigation authority are not taking action to remove them then please think twice before you decide to do it for yourselves.

An article can be found here [£66,000 fine for anglers association following volunteer fatality | IOSH magazine](#); it contains the following: -

An anglers association has been ordered to pay a £66,000 fine after admitting breaching health and safety laws that led to the death of one of its volunteers.

A group of volunteers was carrying out routine fisheries maintenance working, cutting back and clearing vegetation along the riverbank. As fallen branches were being cleared with the use of a chain saw, a member of the party, was hit on the head by a thick falling branch. He died a week later.

The group of volunteers had received no formal health and safety instruction, had not been properly trained for the kind of work they were carrying out, and were using inadequate equipment.

No documented risk assessment was carried out, guidance from The Angling Trust had been ignored; and a proper exclusion zone around the felling site had also not been set-up.

If you feel the need to deal with issues like these then please take extreme care before doing so. Please ensure that a risk assessment is completed and that the work is properly planned and controlled. Please feel free to contact me if you need help.

Climate Change Adaptations

Last month I wrote about the challenges that Climate Change has presented to rowers and the ways in which rowers may be able to adapt to avoid the worst consequences of these challenges.

Over the next few months, we can expect heavy rain, and strong river flows particularly if the super *El Niño* forecasts prove to be correct. People who row on some inland rivers may have difficulty going afloat safely. This disproportionately impacts on people new to rowing and young rowers who are less able to cope with fast flowing water.

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 lakes. Now would be a good time for clubs that are likely to be impacted by high river flows to find alternative places where their members can row safely.

This has been discussed at a National Rowing Safety Committee meeting, and your Regional Rowing Safety Adviser (RRSA) may be able to help you to find a suitable location. RRSA contact information can be found here [Rowing Safety Contacts](#).

Please consult Section 3.5 of [RowSafe](#) as this provides guidance on Training Camps and Rowing on Unfamiliar Waters. Please review the host club's risk assessment and be sure to comply with the rules that they have established for their venue.

Host clubs may wish to make a reasonable charge for the use of their facilities.

Skin protection in strong sunlight.

The risk of sunburn is one of the issues relating to Climate Change mentioned last month. A reader wrote to say: -

The new UV hoodies for sun protection do work well. I've been trying one for a month now. The material is soft and the hood moves with the head and never impedes vision. They offer good protection from the sun on longer outings.

Sun Hoodies are widely available from a range of suppliers.

Drought and shallow water

The recent drought has caused the water levels in some waterways to be lower than usual and have been several incidents where rowers have collided with submerged trees and other obstructions. There have also been incidents where crews have crossed to the "wrong" side of the waterway to avoid shallows and collided with crews travelling in the opposite direction.

Please take extra care and if you encounter underwater obstructions then please share this information with other rowers and clubs who use your stretch of water.

Tideway Navigation Resources

I was asked for information that could be used when providing refresher training to steerspersons (rower/coxes).

The response was these are Tideway Navigation resources: -

- [Tideway Navigation - British Rowing](#) this is also on the TRRC website here [Navigation — British Rowing Thames Regional Rowing Council](#)
- [Tideway Code](#) this is 11 years old and may be obsolete.

I was subsequently told that some of this information is slightly out of date but that it is still helpful.

Trailer Towing Regulations

I was asked for advice on trailer towing regulations. The following links on the British Rowing website were provided: -

- [Guidance for the Transportation of Oar Propelled Racing Boats](#)
- [Towing rowing trailers to the EU - British Rowing](#)
- [‘The days of throwing some boats and equipment on a trailer are sadly long gone’ - British Rowing](#)

Does the boat fit the crew?

I was asked how a coach of juniors could ensure that they are using a boat that matches the weight of their crew as they are not allowed to weigh them. The relevant guidance can be found here [Weighing Rowers and Coxes Guidance - British Rowing](#).

The response was that how this is handled depends on the reason for being interested in the crew's weight. It may be that the coach is keen to ensure that the crew use boats that are suitable for rowers of their weight. This may be relevant for 1xs but becomes increasingly less relevant in larger boats.

It should be possible to make a judgement based on how high or low the boat floats in the water. This should be easy to judge, and any judgement should be made quietly and with no fuss. Please do not say anything like "You are too heavy for that boat, please use this one because it is bigger." Doing so would be stressful to the rowers. Please say something like, "Please try that boat."

Boats will tolerate a wide range of weights, and the key factor is the comfort of the rower in the boat. If the gate (cill) height has to be adjusted in an extreme way to accommodate a rower, then this may indicate that the boat is floating high or low in the water.

If the coach is interested in weight because they want to know more about the physical development of the rower, then they should understand that this is not allowed. There is detailed reasoning in the guidance document.

Control the speed of your launch

There have been incidents and complaints that coaching launches have passed moored boats at excessive speed. Many navigation authorities impose Bylaws or regulations that include speed limits. In some cases, these include exemptions for coaching launches but only when they are accompanying rowers. These exemptions do not apply when launches are trying to catch up with rowers. Please ensure that your launch drivers are aware of the speed limits that apply where they operate and that rowers wait for coaches so that their coaching launches do not have to travel at speed to catch up. They should also stop and wait if the launch engine stops or stalls as occurred in one incident this month.

In general, there is no requirement for launches to have speedometers so drivers should take reasonable care to ensure that they do not disturb or inconvenience other water users.

More on Athletic Hijabs

Last month I wrote about athletic hijabs because they help some people to be able to row. Having these will enable rowing to become a yet more diverse and inclusive sport. This is consistent with our [Equity Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#).

I asked for suggestions and received the following: -

There are sporting hijabs on the market that do not have the long scarf element attached. One of my athletes uses this type. I contacted the parents to suggest the sporting version rather than the one the pupil was wearing which had several metres of scarf wrapped around her neck. I explained my worry at the scarf becoming tangled or caught whilst rowing or capsizing. The parents were very positive and explained there is no religious need for the long scarf element, that is just how it is worn with traditional clothing.



Nike Pro Sport Hijab

£9.99

Not incorporating the scarf is important. Unfortunately, there have been several tragic incidents where teenage girls have died after their scarf or head scarf became entangled in a go-kart's rear wheel or drive axle. There has also been a tragic incident in rowing when a young rower suffered severe brain damage after being held under water for about five minutes when her 4x+ capsized and her hair became entangled in her rigger. There is more information here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-October-2021.pdf](#).

I have also contacted the coaches at two clubs that have significant numbers of Muslim rowers.

My colleague has been in discussion with a kit manufacturer. It would help her to be able to consult with rowers who wear hijabs. If you, or someone you know, would be willing to help her then please contact zoe.smith@britishrowing.org.

Work with USRowing

I was contacted by USRowing to ask whether they could use the [Safety-Alert-Take-care-to-fit-your-lifejacket.pdf](#) as they are working on a Guide to PFDs. They also asked if I would be willing to collaborate on safety matters. They are currently looking at the “Aging Rower” and programs to fit their needs. I answered “yes” to all questions.

Work with Paddle UK

There have been several incidents where rowers and paddlers have interacted because the rowers expect others to comply with navigation rules and paddlers did not do so.

I wrote to my colleague in Paddle UK to explain that rowers rely on people knowing and complying with navigation rules and have difficulties when they do not. This compensates, to some extent, for rowers not facing the way they are going. When I look at the Paddle UK safety information, I do not see information on the need to comply with navigation rules (other than on the Tideway).

My colleague responded to say that a reminder of navigation rules and to keep right has been placed in the Safety Officer newsletter and a statement will be included in Paddlesafer in the next update due in October.

Headphones

A new club member asked their club committee whether it was acceptable to wear headphones while rowing. The response was “no”, but the CRSA could not find the relevant reference in [RowSafe](#) and asked for help. The response was that it is in section 3.2 at the end of the list headed “Safety Rules could include” and says: -

- *Not wearing earphones, etc. when afloat as this can make shouted warnings and alarm sounds difficult to hear.*

This was new this in this year’s edition of RowSafe.

Trailer Emergency Bags

A CRSA wrote to say that, following some problems when trailers were towed, they have assembled Trailer emergency bags to be carried in the towing vehicle. The bags contain: -

Emergency Kit	Tools for Minor Repairs
Two Hi viz long sleeve coats for heavy traffic use (motorways, etc.	Cable ties
Warning triangle for approaching vehicles	Duct tape
Tyreweld tyre repair canister (enables 100 miles at no more than 50 mph)	10 mm and 13 mm spanner
Fire Extinguisher (for all types of fires)	Pliers
Fire Blanket for people and spot fires	Screwdrivers flat and cross head
First Aid kit	Bag of assorted nuts, bolts, screws, etc.
Window hammer/Seatbelt knife	Knife or scissors
Snapstick light stick	
Luggage and tie down straps	

My response was that some of this kit should be carried in the car even when not towing and some is not specific to towing.

I carry hi-viz waistcoats in the seat back pockets, whether towing or not. These are placed so that we can put them on **before** getting out of the car. This is better than having them in a bag in the boot.

It may be a good idea to carry a firefighting kit in the car, but I cannot see why this is more likely to be needed when towing. There is not normally anything flammable in or on the trailer.

Modern cars are very reliable and tend not to break down. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for rowing boat trailers and their loads. What to do in the event of breakdown is covered in [The Highway Code - Breakdowns and incidents \(275 to 287\) - Guidance - GOV.UK](#).

Rule 275 covers “Place of relative safety”

Rule 276 covers Breakdowns (and includes never using warning triangles on motorways)

Rules 277 and 278 are Additional rules for motorways

It is not a good idea to do roadside repairs on busy roads or motorways but having the tyre repair kit seems sensible (get into a lay-by first). Having the kit needed to fix problems is a good idea. Some trailers have spare wheels, but car jacks may not be suitable to lift the trailer. It is not difficult to plan for this; all it may need is appropriately sized blocks of wood.

Appendix 1 - Why nominate rowers for awards?

There are several reasons why we nominate people for awards, they include: -

- to recognise the contribution of the people involved in the saving of a life,
- to inspire others to act to save a life if presented with the opportunity,
- to inform others of the ways that they may be able to save a life,
- to educate clubs and individuals in the preparations they can make so that they are ready to save a life, and
- to celebrate the contribution that rowing makes to society as a whole.

We can only nominate people if they are willing to be nominated. Rescuers sometimes think that they did not do much, but it is important to recognise that they did what they did and in doing so saved the life of another person. In rowing, rescues are often team efforts, and we try to recognise the contribution of each member of the team.

The Royal Humane Society has a hierarchy of awards, and the higher awards are conferred on people who have put their own lives at risk to rescue another person. I would prefer, where possible, that rescuers use their skill and intelligence, rather than their courage. If rescuers put themselves at risk, then they may be harmed. If a rescuer themselves becomes a casualty they are no longer able to support the person that they set out to rescue.