



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

September 2026

Stephen Worley

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

New expectation for Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs)

The British Standards Institution (BSI) has issued an amended version of the standard for workplace first aid kits (BS 8599-1:2019+A1:2026). This includes an expectation any site with five or more people present should have a defibrillator retrievable and ready to use within two minutes from any location on the premises – broadly one minute to reach the device, and one minute to return and prepare it for the casualty.

The reasoning is well established. According to the British Heart Foundation, there are around 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the UK every year, and fewer than one in ten people survive. Early CPR and defibrillation dramatically improve the odds, and every minute of delay reduces the chance of survival. Please understand that good CPR buys time. Do not just stand by and wait for the AED to arrive.

As a consequence, British Rowing is considering updating our expectations, including those in [RowSafe](#), from the current “clubs are expected to **consider** providing an AED in the club” to “clubs are **strongly recommended** to have an AED in the club”. Clubs should also ensure the AED is clearly signposted, regularly checked, and its location made known to all members, coaches, and visitors as part of safety inductions.

Most clubs already achieve this standard. The results of last year’s safety audit show that: -

- 331 clubs (66%) reported that there was an AED In the Club
- 121 clubs (24%) reported that there was an AED Close to the Club but not In the Club
- 20 clubs (4%) reported that there was an AED both In the Club and Close to the Club
- 45 clubs (9%) reported that there was an AED at another Known Location

This year’s audit results will be used to measure improvement and to identify those clubs where there is an opportunity for improvement. We will contact those clubs and encourage them to comply with this expectation.

Rowing Clubs have an excellent track record in resuscitation and the use of AEDs. This can be seen in the resuscitation incident described in [last month’s report](#). There are further examples listed later in this report.

Support is available. In 2025, Dr Anne Redgrave published an article on the British Rowing website [here](#) calling for clubs to install AEDs and describing the charitable funding available.

Please also ensure that your AED is registered with [The Circuit - the national defibrillator network](#). This will help you with regular reminders about the upkeep of your defibrillator.

Anyone needing a reminder on basic life support for a person in cardiac arrest would be well advised to use [Lifesaver](#).

Why do we need to have an AED in the club?

I received an email responding to [last month's report](#), celebrating the resuscitation just outside a rowing club, using the club's AED. However, the email included the following: -

"You write, absolutely correctly: "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."

Since most rowing clubs operate over several kilometres of water, often out in the country without easy access, the implication is that, for most rowing activities most of the time, the acquisition of an AED by a club improves safety by only the tiniest amount on average."

The response included an invitation to review this report [18-year-old Dominic Jones awarded Royal Humane Society Resuscitation Certificate - British Rowing](#)

There is also the more recent incident reported here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-May-2026.pdf](#), where two 14-year-old rowers worked together to save a life.

What they all have in common is the use of an AED that was kept at the rowing club.

We recommend that AEDs are kept at or close to rowing clubs as, in most cases, that is where they are needed and that is where they can easily be found because that is where people expect them to be. They should not be carried on launches as they are not designed for that environment, and they should not be moved from the place where people expect them to be. We have found that people can suffer cardiac arrests after strenuous exercise. Sometimes training is more strenuous than rowing.

It would help if crews carried information about the locations of available AEDs in the area where they will row.

Some years ago, two rowers died, in separate incidents, when they collapsed following indoor rowing training at their clubs. AEDs were fetched from a little distance away but by the time they arrived it was too late.

CPR cannot be delivered effectively in a classic rowing boat. If someone suffers a cardiac arrest afloat then the recommended action is to take them ashore and start CPR immediately. Good CPR buys time. It is important to know where the nearest AED is and bring it to the casualty. Sometimes the nearest AED is at another rowing club. Good planning will enable neighbouring clubs to be in a position to support each other.

I am sorry but the suggestion that *"the acquisition of an AED by a club improves safety by only the tiniest amount on average."* is simply not true.

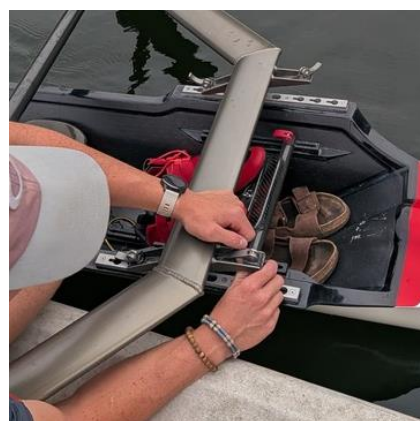
Incidents reported in September

Take care not to be swept onto a buoy

An 8+ from a Learn to Row course was swept onto a buoy by the flood tide. The crew was instructed to push off but only managed to move the boat so that the rigger at 7 was caught in the buoy causing the boat to pivot around the buoy. Had the boat been caught on the rigger at 5 or 3 it may have snapped in half. The boat was swamped as it disengaged with the buoy with water up to the torsos of the cox and the rowers in the stern. The boat was rowed to the shore and emptied. There were no injuries and there was no damage to the boat. Please take care to ensure that new and inexperienced rowers do not row in areas where they can be swept into hazards, even if those crews include some experienced rowers. Please also encourage crews to keep a good lookout.

Take care with quick release wing riggers

A rigger partially detached from a 1x and when it was close to a coach's launch. The rower climbed into the launch and the boat was towed back to the nearby landing stage. There is information on the correct fitting of a wing rigger on the British Rowing website here [Microsoft Word - WinTech Quick Release Wing Rigger Fitting 2.docx](#) and a video here [How to Use Quick-Release Riggers](#)



Check your outboard motor fitting

A launch was hit by wash causing the outboard motor to detach from the transom and sink in deep water. The fittings had been checked and tightened on the preceding day. The club will consider different fittings for those engines, which are permanently left on launches. Some engines are bolted to the transom with bolts that pass through the transom. These are much less likely to detach.

Take care with head injuries

A person fell in the school changing rooms and banged their head. They reported it to a member of staff and were told to wait as there was an end of day briefing happening. The person didn't wait and left the premises. The person's mother later took them to A&E as they were reporting memory loss and were fatigued. There was no blood, but they had a painful swelling on the back of the head.

Please take care with head injuries and use the [Concussion Recognition Tool, CRT-6](#) to determine whether further care is needed. A person with a head injury should not be left unattended. There is further information in the [UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite Sport](#).

Take care with cuts and grazes

Rowers in a 2x capsized and in doing so one rower suffered a cut to their leg and ingested river water which caused them to feel unwell and cough up blood. They were advised to go to hospital and were prescribed antibiotics to clear up a potential infection. Their wound was checked and swelling was detected.

If you fall in, then please try not to ingest any water and wash and disinfect any cuts or grazes as soon as you can. Please assume the water could be harmful unless you know that it is not.

Be considerate when cycling

A cyclist sped through the landing stage area at a competition, with apparent disregard for the safety of people nearby. They were using a phone to video a crew. In future the competition instructions will prohibit cycling through boating area or on the tow path and a local rule will be established to disqualify any crews being followed.

Take care around people fishing

A fishing line with a hook that was hanging from a bridge cut into the shoulder and back of a rower as they rowed under the bridge. The rower managed to cut the line with their keys. They suffered superficial skin damage and completed their own first aid. This incident was reported to police and local fishing committee.

In another incident a rower in a 1x rowed into a fishing line and it became caught across their back. The rower untangled themselves and asked the fisherman to draw their line in next time.

In yet another incident a 2x pulled in to allow another boat to pass. The crew became caught up in three fishing lines around their front riggers and gate. These stopped the boat and it capsized. The crew was unable to right the boat due to the line around the blades and the hull. They swam to the bank where the fisherman gave them scissors so they could free their boat. One rower had lines wrapped around their waist and chest.

Please remember that we share the water with anglers and fishermen. The [Canal and River Trust Boaters Handbook](#) contains the following: -

Keep to the centre of the channel when passing anglers – unless they ask otherwise.

Reduce your wash, but keep a steady pace

Please keep a good lookout for people fishing.

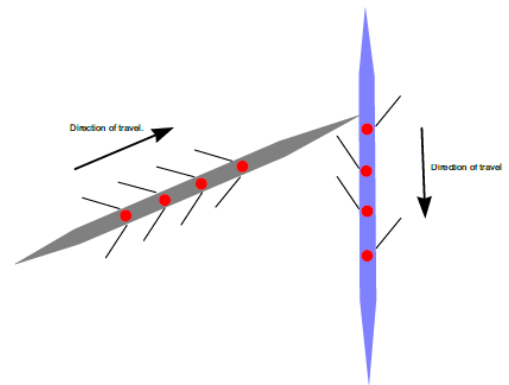
Take care near swimmers

An 8+ was involved in a near miss with a swimmer who was wearing a bright pink swim cap and had a neon yellow tow float. The cox appeared not to have seen the swimmer.

Please keep a good lookout and take extra care in areas where swimmers can be expected.

Take care near crossings

As the 4- approached a crossing point the crew checked that no boats were crossing the navigation channel. After they had passed the crossing, they were hit from the side by a 4x. The bows of the 4x went through the side of the 4-. It is possible that the bow ball came off the 4x at this point. The bows of the 4x hit the rower at stroke causing a deep cut into their left buttock.



The crew of a nearby launch was asked to call the Coast Guard. The 4- went ashore to assess the injury to the rower and the damage to the boat. The 4x also went ashore. The crew of the 4- used a bandage from the First Aid kit in the launch and applied pressure to stem the bleeding. Penetration by the bow of the 4x caused considerable blood loss. The Lifeboat arrived and the crew took over the treatment. The rower was taken to hospital for further treatment.

Please keep a good lookout and take extra care at crossing points and in other places where there is a risk of collision.

Take care of your competitors

A rower took part in a long-distance race in a 2x and arrived at the finish exhausted. They were unable to exit the boat without assistance and were carried from landing stage to the first aid area, presenting with muscle weakness, and moderately impaired speech and hearing. Data from athlete's wearable monitoring device indicated that their heart rate had within the previous thirty minutes peaked and then quickly plummeted. The rower was placed out of the sun on their back with raised legs and head supported, and initially offered water, followed gradually by the athlete's own electrolytic drink, and sugar-containing snacks. The rower recovered gradually over the following hour and required no further medical attention and, later, their parents took them home.

It is understood that the rower felt a little unwell before the event started. They were taking paracetamol for what they described as "a bit of a headache".

There were some questions about the medical care at the competition. The event organisers had arranged for a first aid crew to be present from a local organisation similar in status to St John Ambulance. Unfortunately, the first aid crew arrived later than expected. The rower was in one of the first crews to finish. Support for this rower was provided using a best-effort approach, by a member of the club who is a nurse and in the presence of the rower's parents. Heart rate was monitored both manually and via the athlete's wearable device.

Please review the First Aid and medical provision available to competitors at your events in light of this information and ensure that your medical support team is ready before the start of the competition.

Take care not to hold crews at front stops

The crew of a 2x was practising roll-ups together and lost balance and capsized. Other members of the club performed buddy rescues of both rowers. It was unclear whether one of the boat hatches had been securely fastened prior to the capsize. There appeared to be a larger than expected volume of water in the bow section when the boat was recovered.

Boats are not stable when the whole crew is sitting at front stops. If you need to practise roll-ups then do it with half the crew at a time. The remaining crew members should be sitting the boat. Please also ensure that boats are thoroughly checked before they go afloat.

Anti-social behaviour

Two members of the public who appeared to be intoxicated by drink and drugs and who were known to the police showed extreme aggression on being politely asked to move away from steps to allow a junior session to begin. The coach called 999 as they had threatened to drown the coach. The club has had frequent contact with the police over the summer due to incidents of anti-social behaviour and had been advised to call 999. Other members stayed away from conflict to avoid agitation but close enough to be able to provide support. The Police attended and the offenders left as the Police arrived. The offenders haven't returned to club since.

In another incident a rower in a 1x and a coach in a launch were shot at by youths using catapults. No one was hit and no equipment was damaged; the rower was not distressed. The coaches were reminded to call the police on 999 immediately and not wait until they get back to the club. The incident was later reported to the Police.

Hazards due to hire boats

Hire boats were on the wrong side of the river swerving to miss junior scullers. These boats were driven by adults who were oversteering hitting the bank and then swerving to narrowly miss scullers. There were other similar incidents where these boats were driven by children with limited supervision, on wrong side of the river, colliding with rowers and moored boats. The boat hire company has been notified.

Please keep a good lookout and take extra care in areas where hire boats operate

Take care near weed

There have been several incidents where rowers have had their oars caught in weed. In one case this caused a 4x to capsize. Please try to avoid rowing in areas where weed can be found.

Take care near swans

A submerged swan rose to the surface from under a rower. It then appeared to panic being trapped within the rigger, hitting the rower several times. There is information about swans here [Swans and Rowing - British Rowing](#)

Take care when driving the launch

There were several incidents relating to inconsiderate use of launches, these include: -

- A 1x was swamped when a launch driver drove too fast and too close.
- A driver twice drove their launch with inconsiderate speed and proximity to a group of rowers in 1xs one of whom had to stop to bail out.

Please take care when driving a launch and consider the safety and comfort of others in the vicinity.

Take care in shallow water

An 8+ was approaching landing stage. The water level was very low and piles supporting landing stage were visible. The bow hit one of the exposed piles beneath the landing stage and the bow ball broke off.

Please take care as water levels are often low after prolonged droughts.

Take care when rowing round bends

A 2x approaching a bend was on the correct side of the river. A 4- was approaching the bend from the other side was cutting the corner and struck the 2x sufficiently to ride over the backstay and the sax board. The bow ball struck the rower at stroke with sufficient force to break the skin close to their spine. Bleeding continued for most of the night, requiring attendance at hospital. The 4- is currently unusable.

In another incident a 2x collided with 1x causing the 1x to capsize and break a blade. The 1x was on the wrong side of the river, cutting the corner.

In another incident a 4x rounded a corner at full pressure and could not reduce speed sufficiently to avoid hitting a stationary 2x.

In yet another incident a 4- was rowing upriver around a bend and was taking a faster line that took the boat into the middle area of the river. The 4x was on the correct side of the river doing a faster piece around the same bend on their way downriver. They collided with some boat damage and no injuries.

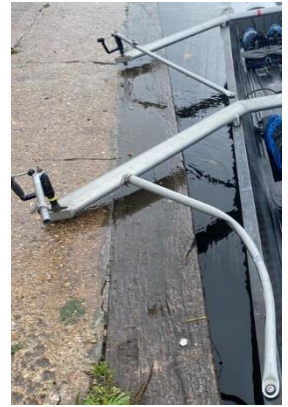
Please keep a good lookout and take care when rowing around bends and please consider whether it is safe at your club to row, at speed, around each of your bends.

Take care when carrying your boat

A 1x was dropped when it was being carried; as a result, the boat was cracked. This is thought to have been caused by carrying the boat at the ends where grip isn't quite as secure and trying to catch a bottle slipping from a pocket with only one hand on the boat.

The protection provided by backstays

There was a collision between a 2x and a 4x causing some boat damage and injuries to the rowers at bow. The severity of the injury to the bow rower in the 4x was probably reduced by the energy needed to deform the backstay. Had the backstay not been fitted then the rower would have been struck by the stiffer wing rigger.



The “Can of Coke” fallacy

There was reference in a report to giving a rower flat coca cola following a capsizing as it was assumed that this would protect them from the consequences of swallowing contaminated water. Please note that the drinking of Coke, flat or otherwise, or any similar liquid has absolutely NO beneficial effects for anyone who has swallowed contaminated water (or any other kind of water). There is a myth that it does, but this has been categorically shown to be false. It was subsequently reported that a launch driver had been informed on his RYA course that they should recommend coke and ginger biscuits!

The response was that unfortunately the "can of coke" myth is as pervasive as it is false. The best thing to do is to inform the rower of the symptoms they can expect from ingesting contaminated water (e.g. lethargy, diarrhoea, headaches, vomiting and muscle pain) and ask them to seek medical advice if these symptoms are severe or persistent. In doing so they should tell their medical adviser that they have been exposed to potentially contaminated water.

Take care of your blades

A rower cut their hand on a blade while putting it away. They pushed it upwards using the edge of the spoon which had lost its vortex edge leaving a sharp edge. Shards of the spoon were imbedded in the junior's hand. A First Aider cleaned the area and bandaged the hand.

Please take care to ensure that your equipment does not have any sharp edges.

Take care of rowers with a visual impairment

Full crew and helpers were putting the boat back in the boat house, stern first. A rower with a visual impairment bumped into a rigger on another boat causing a small graze to their forehead. No medical treatment was required. The cox and crew have resolved to take extra care of this rower. Despite their sight challenges, it is easy to forget this rower has a visually impairment as they do not let this affect their enthusiasm for rowing or to be a full member of the squad.

Take care with the speed of your launch

Last month I wrote about the need for consideration for other water users by not driving launches at excessive speed particularly when not being alongside crews that were being coached. There continue to be complaints.

I was fortuitously present at a club on the Upper Thames when Environment Agency inspectors visited to assess the wash produced by a catamaran launch with a view to issuing an exemption certificate under the [Thames Navigation Licensing and General Byelaws 1939](#) (28(a)). The assessment was made by measuring the wave height produced by the launch at different speeds. This exemption is launch specific and exempts the launch from speed restrictions under certain conditions. These conditions include: -

The exemption shall apply to the vessel ONLY when directly engaged in the training, coaching or umpiring of oared and sail vessels.

The exemption shall apply to the vessel ONLY when it is being navigated in the fairway of the river which shall normally be taken to mean the centre third of the river. The exemption shall not apply in lock cuts or the approaches to any lock.

The inspectors made it clear that the exemption does not apply to the launch when it is not in the immediate vicinity of the boat being coached. In other words, it is not acceptable (and is an offence) to catch up with or otherwise approach, at speed, a crew that is about to be coached or to move away, at speed, from a crew that has been coached. Please coordinate your activities so that, for example, the crew waits for the coach.

The speed restrictions may vary from place to place so please check the speed restrictions (e.g. in the byelaws or navigation rules) at the place where you row.

How many safety boats do we need at a competition?

I was asked about the number of safety boats needed for a competition where there will be 50 boats on the water, leaving at intervals to row over a 3.2km course. The competition had planned to have two safety boats.

The response was that requirement for safety boats should be determined in the risk assessment. It is usually a function of: -

- the number of rowing boats and the number of rowers afloat at any one time,
- the length of waterway that they are spread over,
- the hazards that the rowers are exposed to (e.g. weirs, high speed flows, bends, etc.)
- the collision risk, and
- the capacity of each launch and the skill of the launch drivers and crew.

Other issues like communication (radios) and coordination are also important. Two safety boats are rarely sufficient.

The plan should also consider what happens if one, or more, of the safety boats is busy assisting rowers. At this point the rescue capacity would be compromised. The organisers should decide whether the competition should be stopped or suspended. This should be incorporated into the safety plan.

How to conduct a capsized drill for Juniors

I was asked provide the current BR guidelines or expectations for any junior capsized training.

The response was do not assume that all children can swim whatever the Key Stage Two targets say. Many children cannot. The expectation in section 3.6 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#), states: -

Everyone taking part in rowing should be able to:

- *Float unaided for at least five minutes*

And ideally

- *Swim at least 50 metres in light clothing (rowing kit).*
- *Tread water for at least two minutes.*
- *Swim under water for at least five metres.*

Those rowers who can only float or swim when wearing a buoyancy aid should also wear such an aid, or a lifejacket if coxing, whenever they are afloat.

There is supporting evidence here [RNLI: Float to Live](#) and in more detail here [The Science Behind Float To Live](#).

There is information on how to coach the capsized and recovery training on RowHow here [Course: Capsized Drill | Home](#).

Work with PaddleUK

Information on incidents has been shared with my colleague at Paddle UK. In one case the contents of a PaddleUK incident report were posted as a comment on a British Rowing incident report. This resulted in an amicable resolution between the clubs involved.

A kayaker's perspective

In an incident, a 2- collided, at low speed, with a kayak that was heading in the same direction. The kayaker was struck on the back of the head by one of the blades. The rowers stopped and spoke to the kayaker and one of the rowers phoned the kayaker the following day to apologise and check that they were OK. The rower has resolved to look further round when steering.

The rower reported this incident using the British Rowing Incident Reporting system and the kayaker reported it as a Paddle UK Safety Incident. The kayaker took video of this incident and added his own comments. This was uploaded to <https://youtu.be/IgiUprkjhv4>. He mentions the phone call from the rower.

Please take extra care to keep a good lookout and avoid collisions.

Octogenarian Rower

I was asked for advice by a coach at a club that has a group of active masters club members who inspirationally continue to have outings well into their 80's. One of these rowers has now started to participate in their Senior/Masters squad sessions. These sessions tend to be over greater distances and intensity than the other master's sessions. The club is concerned because although the rower is fit and strong for their age, and the club does not want to curtail their passion, the coaches are becoming concerned about the potential health consequences.

The response was that this member should discuss their wish to row with the Senior/Masters Squad with their GP (with a full description of the type of rowing to be undertaken). They should seek medical advice and follow it. The club should produce a risk assessment, that includes the advice from the GP, and the club should consider the overall strategy to allow this individual to row at this level. There may be others who wish to follow this rower's example, and they may not be as fit and well or have other problems that will have to be addressed.

Visit to a Rowing Club

I was asked to visit a rowing club to review their safety arrangements and provide advice. The club is focused on elderly rowers and many of those rowers are aged over 80. The oldest member is 91. The club is very well run, and its management of safety is exemplary. There were very few opportunities for improvement. These included: -

- Replace the old heel-restraints notice with the April 2022 Safety Alert version, and ensure members are shown how to adjust heel restraints.
- Mark the locations of accessible AEDs (including access codes) near the river on the club map (carried on boats).
- Review the capsized drill content and consider including Buddy Rescue.
- Add a 'Fire Exit – Keep Clear' sign outside the fire escape.
- Consider a buddy system for rowers who row alone.

Mild and Severe Hypothermia

As winter approaches it would be worthwhile to remind ourselves on the difference between Mild and Severe hypothermia. This is explained very clearly in this video [Wilderness Medicine: Mild vs. Severe Hypothermia - YouTube](#). Fortunately, severe hypothermia is rare in the UK, and I have never heard of it happening to rowers or coxes.

If someone has mild hypothermia (is lucid and shivering) then follow the advice in the video and "do whatever your mother would do". If they have severe hypothermia (no longer lucid and not shivering) then dial 999, request an ambulance and follow the instructions given by the ambulance call handler.

There is more information on hypothermia in section 8.1 of [RowSafe](#).

Support for US Rowing

I was asked for advice by a colleague at US Rowing. They are considering requiring every rowing organization in the US to have a designated Safety person. They asked to schedule a meeting, but we are currently on holiday in India so that could be a logistical challenge. They would also like to learn more about our annual audit and how it works for us.

My response was that we currently have expectations rather than requirements. Section 3.4 of [RowSafe Club Rowing Safety Adviser \(CRSA\) Job Description](#) starts by saying: -

It should be noted that Club Rowing Safety Advisers are not responsible for rowing safety, but they are expected to provide advice on Rowing Safety. It is the responsibility of the individuals and their clubs to ensure that people are not harmed by the club's activities.

It continues with: -

Club officers are expected to ensure a positive safety culture and safe practice within the club; they are expected to:

- *Appoint a Club Rowing Safety Adviser(s), to lead and advise on promoting safe practice.*
- *Support the Club Rowing Safety Adviser and take their advice into account.*
- *Ensure that safety is a regular agenda item at meetings.*

This is an expectation rather than a requirement, but I expect that there is a requirement in our Regulations. This does not really matter because all clubs have a CRSA; I have never heard of a club not having at least one.

The CRSAs are advisers and not officers. They do not have hierarchical authority within their clubs, but most have great moral authority. When they speak, people listen. We did not want to have Rowing Safety Officers as then there would be a risk that all the tasks and responsibilities would fall on them. We frequently say that clubs are responsible for the safety of their members and that everyone is responsible for their own safety and that of others.

There are two issues to explain in relation to the Safety Audit, there are the contents and the process. The contents are described in a file that was attached.

The process is that each year, at about this time, the audit opens and each club completes a self-assessment and uploads required documents. These are then reviewed and accepted, or not, by the relevant Regional Rowing Safety Adviser (RRSA). If the RRSA accepts the package then the audit for that club is complete. If the RRSA is not happy with the submissions, then they may raise questions or ask for further information. If the club's audit is not completed and accepted by the middle of December, then the club is barred from entering competitions. Clubs ensure that this does not happen and do take the audit seriously.

I, and others, can analyse the results of the audit to determine trends and follow up with those clubs where we feel that there is an opportunity for improvement.

It is tempting to think that some features of our rowing safety management system that we take for granted are not common world-wide.

British Rowing Safety Training material

Several training modules are being reviewed and comments were made on drafts of the following modules: -

- Safety Basics
- Capsize and Recovery and
- Cold Water and Hypothermia

Product Safety Report

There is a government announcement here [Product Safety Report: GARVEE Buoyancy Aid \(2609-0066\) - GOV.UK](#) that these Buoyancy aids are not safe to use. Fortunately, they were rejected at the border so there should be little danger of them being used in the UK.