

Risk Assessment

'Hazards are reduced by precautions which when taken make the risk smaller'

As Clubs have developed so they have either formally or informally assessed the local risks involved in their activities and have evolved rules and safeguards in an attempt to reduce or eliminate these risks.

What is meant by risk assessment?

Risk assessment is a process carried out to identify potential safety hazards and to ensure that each is properly understood. Further it is to check whether existing safeguards and emergency plans are adequate to reduce risks to a tolerable level, or whether more action is needed.

Finally it is to highlight intolerable risks to determine steps to overcome or eliminate them.

- Risk in this context arises from the likelihood of an accident occurring as a result of a hazard.
- Risk reduces in direct proportion to the precautions taken.
- Risk assessments are only worthwhile if action is taken on the findings. Assessments need to be carried out by competent persons with knowledge of the activities, and locations, being assessed.

As an assessor ask yourself the following

- What hazards exist?
- In the course of the activity being assessed who is at risk?
- How often does the risk occur?
- Is an accident likely or unlikely?
- How serious could the consequences be?
- What steps exist to prevent accidents?
- Could more be done to reduce the risk?

Because there are many different aspects of our sport, it is important to consider as many as possible, drawing in other parties with relevant knowledge to assess risks within their particular areas of expertise.

A simple risk level estimator

BS8800 1996 provides a simple risk level estimator together with a risk based control plan which can be modified to relate more directly to the rowing environment.

Severity of Outcome			
Probability of accidents	Slightly harmful	Harmful	Extremely harmful
Highly unlikely	Trivial risk	Tolerable risk	Moderate risk
Unlikely	Tolerable risk	Moderate risk	Substantial risk
Likely	Moderate risk	Substantial risk	Intolerable risk

Example

a slightly harmful event might be grounding craft on a shoal or obstacle

a harmful event would be collision with minor injury to person and slight damage

an extremely harmful event could be a collision with a motorised craft or a bridge buttress involving immersion of more than one person.

A simple risk based Control Plan

RISK LEVEL, ACTION AND TIMESCALE

Trivial - No action required.

Tolerable - No additional controls are required. Consideration may be given to a more

effective solution or improvement.

Moderate - Efforts should be made to reduce the risk. Risk reduction measures should be implemented within a defined time period. Where the moderate risk is associated with harmful/serious consequences further assessment may be necessary to establish more precisely the likelihood of harm as a basis for determining the need for improved control measures.

Substantial - The activity should not be started until the risk has been reduced. Considerable resources may have to be allocated to reduce the risk. Where the risk involves activity already in progress, urgent action should be taken.

Intolerable - The activity should not be started or continued until the risk has been reduced. If it is not possible to reduce risk even with unlimited resources, activity has to remain prohibited.

RISK LEVEL	ACTION AND TIMESCALE
Trivial	No action is required
Tolerable	No additional controls are required. Consideration may be given to a more effective solution or improvement.
Moderate	Efforts should be made to reduce the risk. Risk reduction measures should be implemented within a defined time period. Where the moderate risk is associated with harmful / serious consequences further assessment may be necessary to establish more precisely the likelihood of harm as a basis for determining the need for improved control measures.
Substantial	The activity should not be started until the risk has been reduced. Considerable resources may have to be allocated to reduce the risk. Where the risk involves activity already in progress, urgent action should be taken.
Intolerable	The activity should not be started or continued until the risk has been reduced. If it is not possible to reduce risk even with unlimited resources, activity has to remain prohibited.

N.B. Tolerable here means that risk has been reduced to the lowest level that is reasonably practicable, i.e. an acceptable risk.

Rowing is a safe sport, so what are the hazards being referred to?

In the role of Safety Adviser, the first reference of the Adviser has to be the history book. In other words what hazards have been encountered in the past in running the event or in managing boating activities.

Consider water hazards, depth, turbulence, currents, obstacles and pollution. Look at access to the water, is the bank made up, shelving or vertical. Can casualties be recovered readily and does road access exist? What about visibility? Can all the activities be clearly monitored from the bank? Is there any history of accidents arising from any of the above?

No history of accidents - then look at the activities themselves. Are they supervised or unsupervised, what is the degree of competence of the athletes involved? Time of day, month of the year have an effect on visibility, and on water temperature.

What about the participants - are they a hazard to themselves, can they swim and what tests are carried out to ensure they can? Are they properly clad for the conditions they will encounter? Coxswains must wear lifejackets or buoyancy aids but are they adequate, and in working order, and is the coxswain adequately protected against the elements?

Damaged equipment is a hazard to everyone, the user in the first instance and to those around who may be affected by it or who have been forced into a dangerous rescue operation.