Safety Alert - Difficulty releasing Adaptive-Rower support straps

There have recently been two incidents where adaptive-rowers have capsized when using boats with floats mounted to the ends of their riggers. In both cases the rowers had difficulty in releasing the straps that hold them into their seat.

Adaptive Rowers should be aware that it is possible to capsize a boat with floats. Floats provide considerable initial stability when the boat is nearly upright but the stability decreases rapidly as the boat rolls to one side. Once fully inverted the floats tend to keep the boat stable in that inverted position making rescue difficult.

Extra care is also needed because athletes with spinal cord injuries can present with reduced respiratory capacity, muscle atrophy, osteoporosis, difficulty regulating heart rate, blood pressure, and regulating body temperature. Some rowers may have Scoliosis (a sideways curvature of the spine) meaning that the boat may lean to one side. Ensure that the safety boat has at least two persons on board who are able to rescue the rower and that it has appropriate rescue kit.

An outline Risk Management Plan is presented below, this should be customised to local conditions.

Hazards	Barriers	Hazardous Events	Controls
Inexperience or under-developed technique	Ensure that adaptive-rowers practice sculling drills, particularly the "safe" position and 360° turns. Use more stable boats when conditions or the inexperience of rowers indicate that this is appropriate (for example 2x rather than 1x)	Capsize	Ensure that inexperienced rowers keep close to the bank or in an area where rescue is easy. Ensure that there is an effective means for calling for assistance. Radios on a standalone safety channel agreed amongst users are generally preferred to mobile phones.
Rowers can tend to lean to one side, due to sitting posture	Provide lateral support for the rower in the form of gel packs, wedges, etc. to help hold the rower upright in the seat.	Capsize	Use a safety boat and keep the safety boat within 20 metres of the rower. Ensure that the safety boat has at least two persons on board who are able to rescue the rower.
Straps to support the athlete in the boat	Practice removing the straps preferably as part of a capsize drill. If the practice is alongside the bank or pontoon with the boat supported from the side then the rower should have his or her eyes closed. Ensure that all straps release from the same side and are not secured by mechanical buckles	Capsize followed by difficulty removing straps when under water.	Use a safety boat and keep the safety boat within 20 metres of the rower. Ensure that the safety boat has at least two persons on board who are able to rescue the rower. Fit tabs that have colours that contrast with their surroundings on the ends of the straps to make them more visible.
Feet in well-fitting shoes	Use "clogs" rather than shoes (foot-plate with nylon heel cups)	Difficulty removing feet from shoes	Use a safety boat and keep the safety boat within 20 metres of the rower

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