

BRITISH ROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

May 2019

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

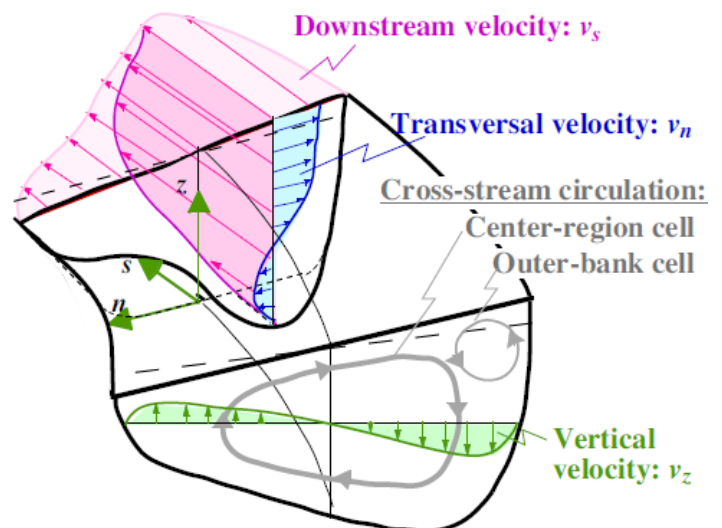
Incident Reports in May

Collision with Dove Pier

There was an incident in which a 2x collided with Dove Pier. The 2x was sculling towards Putney with the outgoing tide. Had it been on the starboard side of the fairway (Dove Pier was on their port side) then it should have cleared Dove Pier by a considerable margin even though the tide was running strongly.

A Safety Alert was recently issued on [Flow Round Bends in Rivers](#); this was written with Dove Pier in mind. The Safety Alert draws attention to a component of flow near the surface that will tend to push a boat towards the outside of the bend, in this case towards the pier. Knowledge of this effect should help crews to steer clear of this hazard.

The crew of the 2x was rescued by a passing coach in a launch. The 2x was wedged by the stream between the moored boats and the crew were in the water hanging on to their capsized boat. A bystander on a houseboat was able to keep the sculler in most difficulty afloat against the force of the water. The other sculler was able to move along the boat to get hold of the launch. The remaining sculler was then pulled to the launch with a throw-line. The RNLI later removed the boat from the pier.



Dove Pier is a well-known hazard on the Tideway. Collisions with the pier, or the boats moored to it, can be extremely harmful. There was a serious incident there in October 2006 when an 8 collided and was broken up by the stream. The crew all entered the water and were rescued. The [report](#) concluded that it a “a tragedy was fortuitously averted”.

The “cox’s blind spot” excuse is not valid

A collision between an 8, reportedly on the correct side of the river and a 1x travelling in the opposite direction caused the 1x to capsize. The “cox’s blind spot” excuse was used in the report. This excuse is not valid. Chapter 5 of [RowSafe](#) on Competence; states that: -

Coxes and steers (including scullers) are expected to:

- *Keep a good lookout at all times when afloat. Coxes who cannot see directly ahead should enlist the help of members of their crew.*



Antisocial behaviour

In May there were too many incidents of anti-social behaviour.

There is a report of children throwing rocks at rowers, hitting one rower and causing damage to their boat. It is that time of year when the good weather brings out people who have limited respect for the safety and welfare of others. Incidents like this should be reported to the police. Use 999 (or 112) if there is any prospect of catching the culprits in the act, otherwise use the police non-emergency number (101).

It is disappointing to note that there were numerous reports of aggressive, harsh and abusive comments to coxes from people in other boats, in many cases causing distress to those coxes. It is to be hoped that rowers and their coaches can learn to treat other rowers, particularly coxes, with more care and respect.

There were some incidents of lack of care by motor boat drivers putting rowers at risk. In one case the bow of a speed boat mounted the gunnel of pilot gig (fortunately no-one was hurt). It is the beginning of the time of year when there are more motor boat movements on inland and coastal waters and time when rowers need to take extra care to keep themselves safe.

Trailer Incidents

There were several trailer incidents. In one, the brakes seized due to lack of maintenance. The recent Safety Alert , "[Check your trailer](#)" addresses trailer maintenance.

In another, a boat became detached from a trailer at 55 mph and flew across the road on to the opposite carriageway. When strapping boats to trailers please remember that sections of boats are tapered so a small horizontal movement of the boat can cause the straps to become slack, use additional ties to ensure that they cannot move horizontally. Also, ensure the straps on boats on the outer arms of trailers go around vertical pillars of the trailer so that, even if the straps become slack then the boat will not fly off the trailer. Check the quality and condition of straps.

In another incident, an athlete slipped on a wet rack arm lost their balance and fell while climbing down from the trailer, landing on a 1x causing damage to it.

Launch driving

There were reports of launch drivers not using a kill cord and of another launch driver driving when concentrating on the screen of his phone. There is guidance to launch drivers in section 5.2 of [RowSafe](#).

Sound Signals

Motor boats manned by professional crews and some manned by non-professionals, will use sound signals to communicate their intentions when taking action to avoid collisions. In one incident, this helped a sculler to understand the movements of a motor boat. There is more information in [RowSafe](#) section 5.1 and this [video](#).



Septicaemia and Suspected Weil's disease

It was reported that a rower was diagnosed with septicaemia after infection of an open blister during training. This is the first report I have seen of a rower with septicaemia so I suspect that it is rare for this disorder to result from exposure when rowing and there may have been another cause.

Another incident was suspected to have been caused by Weil's disease and ill-considered information was posted widely on social media. It should be remembered that Weil's disease is rare in the UK (about 40-50 cases per year in the UK – see the [Safety Alert](#)). In view of the low prevalence of the disease, the alleged source of infection not being typical of this disease and the disease dynamics (rapid onset of gastric symptoms for two friends), then it should not be assumed that this was Weil's disease until there is a confirmed, authoritative diagnosis. Please take care not to spread rumours that could easily harm reputations.

The advice in [Chapter 8](#) of [RowSafe](#) includes that :- *Everyone is expected to:*

- *Read and understand any information on waterborne infectious agents and contamination provided by the club.*
- *See their own doctor as soon as they think that they may have any relevant symptoms.*
- *Inform the club if they have contracted a disease associated with a waterborne cause so that others can be encouraged to take greater precautions.*
- *Cover all cuts or grazes with waterproof dressings if the water is contaminated.*
- *Wash or shower after any significant contact with water from the river, lake, canal or sea especially if they have any exposed cuts or grazes.*
- *Wash hands thoroughly before eating or drinking.*
- *If contaminated water has been swallowed, refer to their doctor with full details of the incident.*
- *Wear suitable footwear when launching or recovering a boat, particularly if it is necessary to wade into the water, to prevent direct contact with the water and protect the feet from cuts and abrasions.*

is relevant and valid.

Safety when using the Bat Logic shoe system

There was an enquiry about the safety of the heel restraints on Bat Logic shoes.

The information was reviewed and the following feedback was provided. I believe that if correctly used then the Bat Logic system can be made to be safe simply by ensuring that the heel restraints are properly connected and that the heel restraints are of the appropriate length. I discussed this, at some length, in the December 2018 monthly report

The problem I have with this company is that the videos on their website show the shoes being used without heel restraints. See <https://batlogic.net/videos/> . This is dangerous and misleading. Providing your club uses them correctly, and not as shown in the videos, then I expect that they can be used safely.



Lifejackets for young rowers

There have been discussions with the mother of several junior rowers about the use of lifejackets by young rowers. She felt strongly that this would be appropriate.

It was explained that our data, and other evidence, leads us to believe that this may be helpful in some circumstances but, on the whole, there are more effective things we can strive to do to improve rowing safety. There is no evidence to support the hypothesis that that having children who row wear lifejackets would improve safety. We also explained, using the [incident analyses](#), that looking where they are going and adhering to the circulation plan would make a significant improvement.

The advice in [RowSafe](#) is that we expect coxes, launch drivers and crews, and coaches afloat to wear lifejackets. Section 6.1 of [RowSafe](#) on "People new to Rowing" states that: -

"Club Officers are expected to: -

- *Make lifejackets available to all rowers and ensure that they are worn by non-swimmers and juniors who have not completed a capsized drill."*

National Competitions

The risk assessments and safety plans, etc. for the National Junior Championships and the National Masters Championships have been reviewed. Feedback on opportunities for improvement have been provided and, where appropriate, improvements have been made. The safety arrangements for these events are acceptable.

There has been extensive discussion about the need for backstays on the forward two riggers of boats, other than 1xs, used in these competitions. Backstays in these positions tend to absorb some of the impact energy during collisions, particularly head on collisions, and thereby reduce the extent of injury. The use of backstays is advised in [RowSafe](#) (see Section 7.1 Boats and Blades).

It was advised that any requirement for backstays to be fitted at a specific competition should be based on that competition's risk assessment. If the risk assessment shows that the layout of the course, marshalling, local rules on practice starts on the way to the start or in warm up areas, etc. results in the probability of a collision being negligible then there is no need for the competition to insist that backstays are fitted in these positions.

The [guidance on backstays](#) was first issued in 2013 by the Sport Committee following a serious incident. There is more information in the Safety Alert on [Backstays](#).

It would be better if people looked where they were going and adhered to the circulation plan thereby avoiding collisions.



The fitting of Backstays to boats that launch from steps

There was some suggestion that backstays on boats that launch from steps could cause problems for rowers getting in to, or out of, those boats. Subsequent discussions showed that these problems were not insurmountable.

Checks were made with another club that launches from steep, narrow, stone steps into an estuary with a large tidal range. Backstays do not cause any problems there.

Racing without a cox-box

There was an enquiry about the rules relating to racing without a cox-box. The reply was that there is no requirement in the rules of racing for crews to have cox-boxes. The only mention is in relation to underweight coxes who carry deadweight. The cox-box is regarded as part of the boat and does not contribute to the deadweight or the weight of the cox. There is no mention of a cox-box in [RowSafe](#).

If a cox-box fails before the start of the race and the cox cannot control the crew sufficiently for the crew to be able to complete the course safely then the crew should withdraw from the competition. Responsibility for that decision rests within the crew. However, I expect that most coxes would be able to conduct their crew along the course safely without a cox-box.

There was a further question about umpires not checking cox-boxes at the start of each race. The reply was that it is ALWAYS the responsibility of the crew and its coach to decide whether it is safe for them to race in the prevailing conditions, if they are permitted to race by the competition organiser. Umpires are not responsible for the condition of boats, that responsibility is ALWAYS with the clubs and crews. Umpires may do spot checks but it is not their responsibility to check that boats are safe to use.

Even when umpires do check boats they will not check cox-boxes because there is no requirement, and no recommendation, for crews to have them.

It is the responsibility of umpires is to ensure safe and fair racing. If a cox cannot control his or her crew due to lack or failure of the cox-box then that is an internal matter for the crew. If that lack or failure of the cox-box causes the crew to commit a foul then the crew must accept the consequences. There is no excuse.

Having reviewed all the significant Incident Reports over the past few years I must add that I cannot remember any incidents that were caused by failure or lack of a cox-box.



RNLI Guidance for Rowers

The RNLI is developing a Key Messages Booklet, one page refers to rowing. A draft of this page has kindly been offered for review and feedback and additional information was provided. This can be summarised as follows:-

- There are almost as many female rowers as male rowers.
- Rowers ages range from about 12 or 13 to over 90.
- Most rowers don't consider our sport to be risky but this is because: -
 - many people work hard to ensure that rowing is safe
 - it really is relatively safe compared to many activities (see note 1 below)
 - there is a greater risk when travelling to an event, club, etc. than when at it.

Note 1 - In 2018 we had 30 incidents that caused serious injury,

- 29 of these were on land,
- 1 was afloat on the water, and
- 0 were in the water.

Most rowers do not wear lifejackets. There is no need to wear one because: -

- rowing is a sport that happens on the water and not in the water
- rowers are taught to regard their boat as their liferaft,
- having an inflated lifejacket makes it difficult to climb onto an inverted boat,
- it also makes it very difficult to climb back into a righted boat
- in the multiple fatality in Arnhem, all the people who died were wearing lifejackets

It is true that most of our "incidents" are caused by behaviour. However, life jackets are irrelevant as the majority of our significant incidents involve collisions rather than capsizes. The behaviours we are trying to encourage on the water are:-

- keep a good lookout
- adhere to the circulation plan
- be conspicuous (hi-vis clothing, lights at night, etc.)

In general, we do not encourage rowers to wear lifejackets except in specific circumstances, these are:-

- gig rowers at sea (we have evidence that gigs are not sufficiently buoyant when swamped)
- coxes afloat anywhere
- people who have not demonstrated the ability to swim
- anyone who wants to do so (or, if juniors, whose parents want them to do so)



Closure of actions following a fatal Ocean Rowing Incident

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) has written to confirm that British Rowing has completed the actions listed in the [report](#) on the “Toby Wallace” incident. These actions were to

- Work together with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in order to develop means by which commercially operated ocean rowing boats can demonstrate equivalent safety standards to those required of other small vessels in commercial use for sport or pleasure. Current Status: Appropriate action implemented.
- Liaise with stakeholders to develop and promulgate a best practice guide or a code of practice for ocean rowing, taking into account, inter alia:
 - Boat design, construction and stability
 - Minimum training requirements
 - Minimum equipment requirements
 - On board procedures
 - Shore-based and seaborne support.

Current Status: Appropriate action implemented.

The MAIB recognises that the actions detailed in the response have been fully implemented; these recommendations have been **closed**.