HRSA Monthly Report

December 2021

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Incident Reports in December

Be extra careful around motorboats

There was a collision between an 8 and a motorised narrowboat (the barge) on a narrow waterway. The sequence of events is described in the report as follows:-

1. The 8 spins above a Lock.
2. The 8 begins travelling upstream at a steady state on the right-hand (correct) side of the river.
3. The 8 approaches the barge, which is stationary on the right-hand side (towpath bank).
4. The barge suddenly moves into the path of the eight, with no warning.
5. The cox of the 8 spots the barge and calls for emergency stop ("hold it up") and for his crew to use their oars to back away from the barge.
6. The bow of barge collides with bow of eight, breaking off the eight's bows.
7. The barge continues to move through the path of the eight, without stopping or slowing, scraping alongside the eight's port-side blades and causing further damage. The steersman does not stop or acknowledge the collision.
8. The 8 is able to park, and a crew member catches up with the barge on foot.
9. At first, the barge's steersman denies any incident, but eventually admits responsibility for the impact, and exchanges details.
10. The 8 returns upstream to the Rowing Club slowly, using four rowers (stern four).

Please encourage crews to be extra careful around motorboats. The rowing crews are often blameless, but it is the rowing boats, and their crews, who are most risk of harm.

There was a near miss, at another club, involving two 2-s and a barge. It contains the following "*A barge was spotted travelling downstream, close to the riverbank on the wrong side of the river. The Barge operator did not see the boats and the crews were required to take avoiding action. The Barge operator turned out to be someone hiring the boat and had misunderstood the navigation advice such that he was on the wrong side of the river. Top tip, keep a good look out for the unexpected, particularly during the Holiday Season".* This is excellent advice.

Show consideration for fellow rowers

An experienced 8 "bullied its way on the bank side to pass a much less experienced 8" as they passed under a bridge. The less experienced 8 was forced to take evasive steering, putting it out of line and into the buttress of the bridge. The coach of the experienced 8 made no attempt to slow, stop, or correct the course of the crew, or to help or apologise. Please remind coaches to be more considerate of other crews.

A collision in the dark

There was a mid-river collision between a 4+ and an 8 in darkness. This resulted in injuries to several rowers, at least one of whom was knocked into the water. The learning from the incident included:-

1. Bank Parties should be made aware that one of their duties or key duty at night is to look out for the safety of their crew and be very vocal to ensure an accident doesn't happen rather than shout when one does!
2. Bright lights on Coaches Bikes/head is a really bad idea, particularly when these are considerably brighter than those fitted to the bow of the boat.
3. Don't assume another boat has seen your crew, particularly at night!
4. Stay tucked into the correct side of the river, especially at night.

Another collision in the dark

There was also a minor collision between an 8x+ and a 60-foot barge. There were diverging reports from the cox/coach of the 8x+ and the master of the barge.

It appears that the barge made appropriate sound signals and had good navigation lights although these were not seen or heard by the cox/coach. It appears that the 8x+ tried to perform an emergency stop but veered towards the barge. The barge reduced speed (and wash size) and the resulting collision was between two blades of the 8x+ and the side of the barge.

The learning point identified by the cox/coach was… *In order to prevent this from occurring again, during the winter months and dark conditions the bow man shall also check regularly behind them and notify the cox of any oncoming objects even if the cox has or hasn't seen them.* This is good advice.

Check the Landing stage or pontoon

There was another incident that resulted in a moderately serious injury involving medical treatment and a protracted recovery. In this incident, a person stepped down from a grass verge onto a wet wooden landing stage to help a junior rower to de-boat. The landing stage so wet that they slipped onto its edge and landed heavily on their chest. The bottom half of their body was submerged in water following the fall.

The person visited A&E where an x-ray identified multiple rib fractures. They have been in severe pain were being treated with ongoing pain medication including morphine. They have been unable to work or drive due to the pain and mobility issues. The A&E registrar advised that recovery would take at least 2 months. The incident has impacted on this person's ability to work, and they have been away from work for some time. They are not able to drive or perform everyday tasks, such as being able to dress themselves and this has impacted on their family. The person's partner has taken annual leave in order to support ongoing medical appointments and day-to-day activities.

In another incident, a rower slipped on the landing stage when carrying the boat to the water's edge. The person involved was able to row although they did have a few bruises. The landing stage was subsequently cleaned, and grit/sand put down. A note was sent to all members to be careful.

Please check your club's landing stage and install anti-slip materials if appropriate.

Simple incidents can cause serious harm

There was a collision between a 2x and a tub 4x+. This resulted in harm beyond what would be expected, consisting of significant muscle damage and potential nerve damage. A rower has since had several physiotherapy appointments and has been under the care of a surgeon to help remedy the pain issue.

It only takes a second

A 2- came alongside a pontoon and one rower "got out the boat and neglected her responsibility to hold the boat stable for her crew mate". The boat capsized pitching the other rower into the water. Please remind crews that it only takes a second's inattention for an incident to happen.

Take Care in the gym

During a circuit class a J14 rower threw a small ball across training room which hit another J14 in the face causing a nosebleed. Please take more care to supervise training sessions and do not tolerate at risk behaviour.

Take care of well-intentioned people too

A helper was trying to move a large item of floating debris when they "fell about six feet from the retaining wall". I was aware that I was going to fall so consciously stepped away from the wall, so that I would enter the water feet first and not risk a head injury. Ambient temperature was around 2-3 degrees, so I was preparing myself for cold shock before I hit the water." Well intentioned people want to help but may not understand the potential consequences of their actions. Please encourage people to help but review spontaneous activities, before they occur, and ensure that they can be completed safely.

Incident Reporting is about Learning and not Fault or blame

There was a report that attempted to blame another crew for navigating incorrectly and causing a blade clash. I commented to explain that the purpose of the Incident Reporting system is to give everyone the change to learn from the experience of others. The information shared is invaluable. It is not about blame or fault or culpability. I think that, in this case, everyone has something to learn. The learning points here are that at low water, when it is not possible to pass between a bridge pillar and the bank, then do not be surprised to see boats navigating on the other side of the bridge pillar. In other words, extra care and better lookout is needed at low water when the effective width of the river is reduced.

Make sure that your crews are prepared for the competition

If you enter a crew into a competition, then please ensure that they are able to cope with the conditions that they are likely to encounter. Check that they can row the required distance in the expected conditions and that they can control and manoeuvre their boat. Also please check that they are appropriately dressed and equipped.

Learning from experience at a Head Race

One Head Race resulted in six Incident Reports from different people at different clubs (there were two reports from members of one club, but these related to different incidents). The more serious problems started when a cold front arrived at the venue. Cold fronts are characterised by a fall in temperature and increase in wind speed and a veering of wind direction (for example a change from south-westerly to westerly). There is more information here. Weather fronts are usually included in the weather maps used in forecasts. Forecasts should be checked regularly both before and during the competition.

Division 1 proceeded without any serious incidents. Most of the problems occurred when Division 2 was afloat as it appears that the weather front arrived at this time. This resulted in rowers spending a protracted time afloat and many became cold and wet, some were reported to be suffering from hypothermia.

The following guidance is contained in RowSafe.

In the introduction of chapter 4 of RowSafe on Competition Safety it says:-

"It is neither fair or safe to expect people, especially juniors, to wait on the water for extended periods. If it is too cold for people to be waiting on the water, then consider whether the competition should take place. Sometimes waiting on the water can be the result of an unplanned incident, this should be taken into account too."

... and in Section 4.5

" In head races during cold weather ensure that boats launch in the same order as they start so that nobody has to wait for a protracted time. Endeavour to ensure that waiting areas prior to the start are beyond, rather than alongside, the course so that rowers have an opportunity to keep moving and thereby keep warm (See Safety Alert – Not Getting Cold at Heads)."

There were several distinct problems:-

The organisers had set a limit of 90 boats for Division 2 (for covid reasons), but the draw listed 115 boats. Boats in Division 2 were supposed to start at 14:00. Crews were permitted to launch late. The instructions also stated that "*for Division 2, any crew not above the weir 15 minutes before race time will incur a 10 second time penalty. Any crew not above the weir 10 minutes before race time will be turned around and not allowed to race*". Neither of these two provisions were enforced.

This resulted in the marshalling areas becoming crowded and crews were held, stationary, for a protracted time in cold conditions. Crews were not allowed to circulate so they had no opportunity to keep warm.

The competition has identified the following improvements to the organisational arrangements for future years:-

1) Entry limit - all future competitions will have a smaller entry size for this division. They will also take into consideration that the competition is in December and assess whether it should be open to J16 and J15 crews for safety reasons.
2) Rules for time penalties and returning late crews will be enforced.
3) Circulation - The crews that were struggling at their station were not offered the opportunity to move. Lower race entry caps, time penalty disqualifications, minimum rower capability and clothing, minimum age considerations will all help to avoid race start delays and time at the marshalling station in the future

4) The competition will pay particular attention to junior entries to take into account the likelihood and impact of unplanned incidents.
5) The competition will also review whether it would be safer to have marshalling points above the start.

There was a further report stating several 8s were blown by the squall towards unmarked submerged rocks opposite the landing area. One boat was holed severely; several rowers had to leave the boat as water was pouring into their positions. The other 8s were fended off and stayed clear. The competition has learned from this and will add further cautions into future head race documentation.

Please do not wait for something like this to happen at your competition. Please learn from what happened here and work to prevent anything like this at competitions that you organise.

Objective criteria for cancelling all or part of a competition

Best Practice has been established at other competitions that have objective criteria by which to judge whether or not it is safe to start, or proceed with, a competition. These criteria take the following into account:-

- Wind speed
- Wind direction
- Water flow speed
- Precipitation
- Air temperature and
- Visibility

In each case the effect at the venue concerned should be considered. This applies in particular to wind direction when the water surface characteristics (e.g., wave height) will depend on whether the wind is blowing across or along the course.

Some of these effects should be considered together. For example, wind against tide can produce rough water and the combined effect of rain and cold can be much greater than either alone.

Once objective criteria have been defined then it is relatively easy to make an unemotional decision on whether to cancel some or all of a competition.

If it is clear from forecasts that the competition should be cancelled, in whole or in part, then it is best to do so as early as possible as this could result in clubs not having to load trailers or transport boats. If strong winds are forecast, then please also consider the risks to people towing trailers and notify clubs accordingly. Please help competitors to enjoy competing safely and avoid putting them at risk.

Learning from experience at another Head Race

There has been correspondence about issues at another Head Race. It appears that there was a last-minute change of a division time and that this was not well communicated to the crews. This resulted in crews having to stay on the water for almost four hours in cold weather. There were no safety launches on the water for a long time whilst crews were waiting at the start.

There were also issues with a launch driver and passenger without lifejackets. Several launches were seen with drivers not wearing kill cords. The safety plan stated that launch crew would wear high vis and carry radios; they did not do either. It was also suggested that the competition should offer a shorter division for beginners.

This simply emphasises the importance of clear, timely communication and the need to have a plan and comply with that plan. Adopt the mantra "*Do What You Say You Will Do*".

Liability of Coaches

There were several comments and questions about coaches being sued and the liability of people who help at clubs. It was again emphasised that one of the benefits of membership of British Rowing is the insurance cover that is included. I would encourage anyone concerned to become a member; there is more information on how to become a member here.

Professional Indemnity insurance is also available to Coach Members (at no additional cost compared with Row or Support Membership). Access to Coach membership is currently under review so please look out for further announcements.

Incident analysis

There was a request for a breakdown of type of incident by age category based on a feeling that the latest monthly report had many of incidents involving juniors. It was thought that would be good to know where efforts at improving safety within clubs would be best spent. Clubs will have their own incident logs to refer to as well.

The response was that we complete a detailed analysis of incidents each year, the latest one is available here. There are several problems with doing a count of incidents by age because we often do not know how old the rowers are and we would want to normalise this number against the relative prevalence of rowers on the water, by age. We do not know the percentage or time on the water by juniors, adults and masters.

Somebody once asked for the relative number of incidents for coxed and coxless boats. The same logic applied.

The analysis of 2021 incidents is in preparation and it is hoped that it will be available soon.

Take Care with Juniors who use ergos

Concern was expressed that a club's Facebook post showed that young athletes were completing 5k ergo tests. The post leads readers to believe that it's not just one J14 doing a 5k test, but all of them from the club doing 5k and 2k tests. Concern was expressed for the youngsters involved, but also that they are publicising this poor practice on their club Facebook page, which could have a wider detrimental impact.

Section 11.1 of RowSafe on Indoor Rowing, it contains the following:-

- Take care to ensure that their rowers do not overexert themselves or encourage others to do so.
- Ensure that their rowers work at appropriate intensity and overall workload.
- Ensure that the drag or resistance is set at the appropriate level for the rower

This matter was discussed with an Indoor Rowing expert within British Rowing

There was concern that the results being achieved would only be possible if the drag factors on the ergos were set high. There is a British Rowing document entitled Guidance On-Water and Indoor Rowing by School Children, here and attached. This contains the following:-

- The drag factor should be kept low for all rowers, but especially beginners and younger participants. A low drag factor simulates on-water rowing and significantly decreases the shearing force across the spine.
- Pauses should be included in the session to enable stretching and to maintain hydration levels.
- Sessions on the rowing machine must include time for a full warm-up and cool-down, as in any energetic activity, and
- The session length and content must be suitable for the ability and training age of the rower.

There is further guidance on Drag Factor Settings on a Concept 2 Ergo, this states that, for general training, fitness and back health British Rowing recommends that the drag factor should be kept low (no greater than 110).

Guidance on the desired length of ergo tests for Juniors can be inferred from the rules of the British Rowing Indoor Championships. These specify the following distances:-

- Year 7/ J12: 2 minutes
- Year 8 /J13: 3 minutes
- Year 9 / J14: 4 minutes
- Year 10 / J15: 5 minutes
- Year 11 / J16: 6 minutes
- Sixth form /J17 & J18: 2,000m

Please take care protect the long-term health of Juniors ensure that they train in a manner that is sustainable.

Approval of launch drivers

There was a request from a club who is overhauling its education and training of launch drivers in association with the RNLI. They had found and referred to an obsolete document that was associated with the 2008 version of RowSafe (I think) and asked whether this had been updated.

The response was that this document does not constitute current advice, but it may contain useful information. I suggested that the external requirements should be considered first. If the local navigation authority or club insurers have requirements for launch drivers then the club should comply with them. In many cases the requirement is to hold the RYA Level 2 Powerboat qualification. You can find the current advice in RowSafe, have a look at section 5.2 on Launch Driving and Section 7.4 on Launches.

The problem we always have when writing guidance is that rowing clubs, and the venues that they use, differ so much. Guidance can be excessive for some clubs, appropriate for others and inadequate for a third group. This is why it is important that you use your risk assessment as a guide when developing your competence requirements.

If there are no external requirements, then please consider what is important at your club. At your club specifically I would expect that knowledge of the waterway navigation rules to be of vital importance. Knowledge of navigation rules are not covered in the document you shared.

Local knowledge is also important. Launch drivers should be aware of your circulation plan. They may also need specific knowledge such as how to drive in the vicinity of a weir or to know how the water flows through bridges and close to bridge pillars.

It is also important that launch drivers are familiar with the types of launches that your club uses and can drive them safely. The characteristics of launches can vary considerably.

Please be aware that we want launch drivers to be competent and that there can be a big difference between competence and qualification. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) used to define competence as "able, by virtue of their experience, education and training, to perform a specified task to the required standard". Competence is task specific; a driver may be competent to drive a launch with a coach aboard but may not be competent to perform a rescue.

Launch equipment

There was correspondence with an experienced and highly qualified CRSA who recommended that aluminium launches carry an aluminium boarding ladder, as shown opposite) that can be stowed away and hooked on to the side of launch when needed. If the casualty can help themselves then it is relatively easy and safe for them to climb aboard. In his view (and mine) rope ladders are useless as the feet swing up and under the boat

This is included in the list of additional equipment in RowSafe Section 7.4.1. Launch Safety Kits

Number of people in launches

There was a response to a previous report where I wrote that:-

"*There was also concern about having an extra person in each launch to assist with rescue. The response was that I worry that if we did advise that clubs always have an extra person in the launch then this would reduce their rescue capacity.*"

This was said not to be RowSafe Guidance in section 2.4 on Launch Driving (and there was a quote from this document). The response was that

I think that you may be reading an obsolete version of RowSafe, the current one can be found here. This will be updated in April 2022 and there will be a link to the new version on the RowSafe page here. The current version does not have a section 2.4. RowSafe contains advice on Launch Driving in Section 5.2 and on launches in Section 7.4. These do not specify that there should be an additional person in the launch. Section 4.7 deals with Competition Safety Boat Providers and does make reference to Safety Boats at Competitions having an additional crew person.

This is a difficult topic and one of those where the answer is often venue specific. It is largely a matter for each club's risk assessment.

Many clubs own small launches many of which are constructed in aluminium, that they use primarily for coaching. These are fine for coaching but not so easy to use as safety or rescue launches. However, when there is an incident on the water then whatever launch is present will be used to assist the casualty. In areas where there are many launches then all those in the vicinity will come and help.

If this involves rowers in the water, perhaps after capsizing, then recovering them into any type of launch is much easier if they do as they have been trained to do and climb on top of their inverted boats. They can often climb into the launch with very little assistance. Launch capacity can soon become a problem and having an extra crewman limits that capacity.

If the risk assessment at the place where you drive a launch determines that there should be an extra person in the launch, or if you feel that you would prefer to have one with you then you should. However, many clubs would find it difficult to have two people in each launch and doing so would limit its rescue capacity (or its speed) and could be detrimental.

Towing driving licence requirements have changed

In previous reports I described the changes to licence requirements for drivers towing trailers that government has announced that it will introduce in autumn 2021. These changes were due to come into effect on November 2021. The government subsequently announced that the change will be introduced at a later date. The changes came into effect on 16th December. There is further information here.

Capsize Training in Open Water

There was a question about the water temperature for capsize training for juniors and adults. The response was that the British Rowing Cold Water and Hypothermia training, here contains the following:-

The RNLI states that cold water shock can occur in any temperature below 15˚C. The average sea temperature in the UK is just 12˚C.

Land water is usually a few degrees colder than sea water. Water temperature is usually highest in September or October. Please check the water temperature before starting the capsize drill; it should be safe if the temperature is above 15 degrees. However, if it does not reach this temperature then it would probably be safe to proceed; people do capsize naturally and survive at all times of year.

Please ensure that you have good rescue facilities immediately available and a place of shelter and recovery nearby. It may help if the rowers wear more clothing than they normally would (e.g., leggings and a long-sleeved shirt) as this would reduce the rate at which the skin loses heat and thereby reduce the severity of any cold shock response.

Juniors usually have a lower body mass index so will chill quicker than adults so extra care is needed with them. There is further information on Capsize and Recovery in Section 3.7 of RowSafe.

Swimming

There was further discussion on whether rowers need to be able to swim and one correspondent suggested asking adult members the following question: "*If your boat capsizes, are you confident you will be able to follow the capsize procedure?*" The British Rowing Capsize and Recovery training can be found here. It advises rowers who capsize to get clear of the boat, get out of the water, get off the water and stay with the boat.

Support for the CPGA

There was a request for assistance from the CPGA following a question from a Gig club relating to the need for a gig to carry flares in their safety kit if they row in an estuary. It was noted that there are estuaries and estuaries, some small and some very large?

The response was that in RowSafe and it says that it depends on the club's risk assessment.

In a small estuary, in daylight, then flares may not be needed particularly if a VHF is carried and the estuary contains mostly small boats (yachts, dinghies, gigs, etc.). They may be needed to indicate the gig's position if they require rescue. This would mean using red hand flares (at night) or orange smoke flares (in daylight).

If the estuary was large commercial or military ships, then gigs may not be noticed. They would probably not show up on radar. It may help to carry white (collision avoidance) flares.

I think that this may be a bit excessive, if crews carry VHFs (and a good torch at night) then this may be sufficient.

Rower having seizures

There was a request from a club that previously had a junior rower who had a seizure in the boat. All precautions were taken, and everyone was safe. The club wondered when he will be able to row again, he is seeing the doctor soon. They wanted to know whether there are any specific things he needs to find out to allow him to row again. He doesn't have epilepsy, it was just a one-off seizure whilst rowing.

The response was let's start by being positive. It is safe for people who may have seizures to use indoor rowing machines, but they should not do so unsupervised. Our safeguarding guidance will tell you that Juniors should be supervised by adults at all times when they are at the rowing club.

I would advise you not to let this person go afloat until you have received medical advice confirming that it is safe for him to do so. His doctor should not give you details of the rower's medical condition but should be able to tell you what he can do safely, what he cannot do safely, and anything you should know or do to keep him and others safe. If there is anything you can do to help this rower's health to improve then the doctor should be able to advise on that too.

For example, it may be that the doctor will prescribe medication and may suggest that you check that the rower has taken his medication before he goes afloat.

Our Medical Panel Guidance on Rowing and Epilepsy can be found here. I think that it would be prudent to apply these general principles until you have specific information from his doctor.

To Flash or not to Flash

There was mention of lighting on rowing boats in last month's report. This caused some discussion of the use of flashing or fixed white lights on the bows of boats. I did not address this issue directly last month because it is a matter of compliance with the rules of the local navigation authority, if they have any such rules, or of agreement between local clubs in the absence of rules.

On the tideway, the practice has been to display a flashing white light on rowing boats and other unpowered craft. This is a PLA requirement in order to assist drivers of commercial boats to enable them to distinguish rowing boats in what can be a busy and potentially dangerous waterway.

On other stretches the standard practice is for boats to be lit with a fixed (non-flashing) light. The use of a fixed light also helps better to distinguish a boat's distance and direction than the use of a flashing light.

At sea and in coastal waters it would be conventional to use fixed lights on boats as the use flashing lights is reserved for navigation aids (lighthouses and buoys) and hovercraft.

Some Risk Assessments are not really Risk Assessments

There was a discussion with a CRSA who suggested that it was appropriate for a rowing club to use the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) risk assessment protocol. This is intended for "small, low risk businesses". I feel that this template is wholly inadequate for rowing. We need something which will promote more considered thought about what hazards are present, how these hazards can cause hazardous events, how this can be made less likely and how the harm caused, should these events occur, can be made less severe. This is the basis for our approach to risk assessment.

The response was that one of the reasons the HSE's Risk Assessment protocol is not suitable and sufficient for rowing is that it is not a risk assessment. It cannot be used to assess risk as it does not lead to a determination of the level of risk. If it does not assess the risk, then it is not a risk assessment. If you cannot determine the level of risk, then how can you determine whether the level of risk is tolerable.

We are trying to make it easy for everyone to understand risk and determine what they should do to make the rowing session (or anything else) that they are about to do safer. This understanding helps them to identify hazards and determine what harm can result. Then there are two things to consider, Prevention and Recovery. We use the terminology of "Barriers to reduce the probability" and "Controls to reduce the consequences' , but this is just jargon, it is the concepts that are important. This is the basis of our Safety Basics training and is fundamental to the start of our Risk Assessment process. Our Risk Assessment training and process simply expands upon the approach outlined in Safety Basics.

We do not dictate the format of risk assessments, or anything else, but we do expect them to be sufficiently detailed and thorough (the legal term is "suitable and sufficient"). There is a section in Chapter 3 of RowSafe (3.4 I think) that contains the Job Description for CRSAs. This says that they should each have completed the Advanced Risk Assessment Training (available here). This training contains templates. I would naturally expect to see risk assessments that use this template but would accept those that do not so long as they pass the "detailed and thorough" test.

Coaches should be able to examine the conditions etc. before an outing and consider the hazards and hazardous events that are present at that time, this is included in Coach Education courses. This is in addition to the permanent hazards that are covered by their club's full risk assessment. This could be called a Dynamic Risk Assessment but that would be wrong because it is not a risk assessment at all. It does not determine the level of risk, but it is left to the coach (or anyone else) to conclude, with all this in mind, whether it is safe to do what is planned or whether plans should be changed. Unfortunately the HSE's approach does not permit this.

All risk assessments are vulnerable to failure to identify one or more hazards, it is the fundamental weakness of the process. The HSE docume. does not help with this. Our training and documentation breaks this down and makes the process both easier and more reliable by providing nine categories of hazard to consider.