



BRITISHROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

December 2022

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents Reported in December

Please take care when Launching

A rower slipped on an icy landing stage, into the river, as a boat was being placed on the water. He recovered himself immediately and changed into warm and dry clothing. The landing stage became wet when the Senior men's 8+ launched previously and the water subsequently froze.

In another incident a coach stepped off a landing stage into the water when he was coaching a junior attached with a rope and was distracted by passing crews. He did not get too cold as he was wearing seven layers of clothes for the cold weather and the inside layer on top was only partly wet.

Please concentrate on your own safety when on landing stages and use appropriate footwear.

Keep a good look-out, always

The 8+ was building into the start of its run. The cox looked down at his rate meter then looked up and was in line with a tree protruding out into the river. The boat hit the tree head on and this stopped the boat. The crew tried to pull it off the tree but was unsuccessful and the stream took the stern round. This caused serious damage to the bow of the boat. All the rowers were rescued by launches. This freed the boat and it was towed back to the club.

Launch Drivers should also keep a good lookout

An inflatable coaching launch was holed when it was hit by the stern of a 4x+. This caused a 75mm tear in the bow tube of the inflatable. Fortunately, the launch was able to return safely to the landing stage.

Take care in launches too

A coach in a launch alongside the bank found that part of his launch had become entangled with another launch. When it unhooked he lost his balance and fell forward over the back of the launch into the water. Only his bottom half got wet and he was not injured in any way. It would have been safer if someone on the bank had helped.

Please ask for help and keep yourself safe.

Take care to check the launch before going afloat

An experienced launch driver was alone in the launch. He noticed an issue with water ingress and initially attempted to manage the problem by bailing with a bucket. Over the course of the next few minutes, he found that the water level was rising and that the bung in the launch had been improperly sealed. He alerted his crews and tried to get closer to the bank. The resultant turning force together with the large amount of water in the launch caused it to capsize about 40m from the bank. One of the coxes saw the capsize and alerted the RNLI.

The kill cord on the launch stopped the engine and the coach chose to swim to the bank rather than stay with the boat. Unfortunately he neglected to inflate his manually activated lifejacket. He was helped to walk back to the boathouse. Club members, the local Sea Cadets and the RNLI worked together to retrieve the Club's equipment.

Please take care to check launches and use lifejackets correctly.

Take care to maintain your outboard

A pull cord trapped the driver's hand as they tried to start the motor. The driver suffered acute pain and was taken off the water by other rowers and sent to A&E. There has been extensive medical treatment, surgery and rehabilitation. Loss of the use of the hand for a time after surgery and loss of rowing time for the next 6 months. The driver suffered a broken finger and torn ligaments in the hand.

In another incident, a coach started a launch engine after a few attempts but it stopped after he had driven a few metres. As the coach was trying to restart it, the launch drifted into the pontoon and under the ramp between the pontoon and the land. The tide was running and this caused the launch to capsize. The coach's lifejacket inflated. Someone called the Coastguard and the coach tried to stay with the launch but had to leave it as it floated into the downstream pier. The coach was rescued by another launch.

Please ensure that your equipment is well maintained and replace any defective equipment without delay.

Check for frozen ties

Boats were checked on the trailer prior to departure but two boats fell off when the trailer went over a bump down the road. The ties were frozen and were slipping as they had no grip; they failed to hold the boats on the trailer. No-one was injured, no other road users were involved. A double was snapped in half a third of the way from the bows and a hole put in a fine wooden single.

Take what you need with you

In the marshalling area just before the start a Sculler reported to a marshal that they had a diabetic condition and was having a bit of an issue but wished to continue with racing. The marshal queried this but the athlete was adamant they wished to continue. The sculler was later observed rowing to the bank, through the boats, rather than completing the course and a paramedic was sent over to the location. The sculler reported that a supporter was waiting with supplies and that was why they had rowed through the boats. The sculler left with the assistance of their supporter.

Rowers have been known to faint at, or after, the end of outings and races due to their not having eaten sufficiently. Please ensure that you are fully prepared to complete whatever you are planning to do.

If you are likely to need any medication, or anything else, during an outing then please take it with you.

Take care when catering

The lid of a hot water urn was lifted and the rising steam scolded the person's wrist. The first aider on site wrapped the burn in cling film and taped it so it was secure. It was also suggested to take some paracetamol or ibuprofen. This is consistent with the treatment recommended by the NHS [here](#).

How many clubs have defibrillators?

An analysis of the data from the annual safety audit shows that 58% of clubs have a defibrillator within their club. Some of these will be shared by other clubs that use the same boathouse.

If we include the number of clubs where there is a defibrillator accessible nearby that can be brought to the club in less than two minutes then this increases to 85%. If we then add the clubs where rowers know where other defibrillators are available that can be accessed during an outing then this rises to 91%.

We are approaching the point where clubs can be expected to either have access to their own defibrillators, or one nearby, as this is the position at over 90% of clubs.

It was assumed that there are no defibrillators at the clubs where there was a lack of data entered. I intend to write to the 9% of clubs that do not have access to defibrillators to check that their information is complete and, if the information for that club is correct, ask if there are plans to acquire a defibrillator.

First Aid Training

A St John Ambulance (SJA) First Aider and Community Advocate wrote to say that SJA is offering free Emergency First Aid sessions for any interested community groups (there is more information [here](#)). He would recommend the Emergency First Aid session as this covers resuscitation. These “awareness” sessions do not lead to any formal First Aid qualification, but should help people to know what to do (and not to do) in an emergency and how to call for help.

I explained that we have a Safety Alert on "What to do if someone collapses in a boat" [here](#). In that there is a link to another Safety Alert on "Staying Alive"; this focuses on hands only CPR. We have had cases of the successful use of CPR and AED in rowing and I have published information about this. This is not a particularly frequent occurrence as we do not have many heart attacks or cardiac arrests.

We require Coaches to complete Emergency Aid Training as a prerequisite to their Level 2 Club Coach qualification and to refresh this training every three years.

The thing to remember about CPR is that, to be effective, it should be a relay and not a marathon. It needs a series of people to take it in turns. This is one of the reasons why it is important that lots of people are trained to do it. I often recommend the Resuscitation Council UK's [Lifesaver](#) interactive game. I find it very effective if an alternative to face to face training is needed. .

If you would like to organise a session at your club then please review the information on the SJA website. If you would like to contact the Community Advocate who wrote to me then please write to me at safety@britishrowing.org and I will forward your email.

Environment Agency Red Flags and Boards

There has been some discussion of the meaning of Red Boards as displayed, from time to time, by the Environment Agency. There is an explanation of “What the warnings mean”, [here](#). This includes the following statement:-

When these red boards are displayed on lock gates, the Environment Agency advises users of all boats not to navigate. The strong flows make it difficult and dangerous.

This is advice and not a navigation restriction or a river closure. It is up to each club to take the red boards, etc., into account when determining whether, or not, it is safe to continue to do what it plans to do. This is the advice provided by an authoritative body and should be treated with respect.

The [Tideway Code](#) (see page 15) describes the coloured flag system used to provide warnings when tidal ebb flows are augmented by strong fluvial flows due to heavy rainfall in the upper Thames catchment area. This contains the following:-

All small boats using the Upper Tideway should monitor this system and use the advice provided to judge if their boat choices are suitable and crews are sufficiently experienced for the prevailing ebb tide conditions.

The Upper Tideway is the Thames between Teddington and Putney

Real life is never as simple as we would like it to be. It all depends on your club's risk assessment.

If the place where you row contains hazards such as weirs, moorings, fixed pontoons, bridges, bends, overhanging trees, etc. then you may decide that it is not safe to permit rowers to go afloat when the river is flowing fast. If during high flows the river becomes turbulent such that steering is made difficult or dangerous then you may decide that it is not safe to go afloat.

You may also wish to consider the capabilities of the crew. Conditions that may be safe for your most powerful crews may overwhelm your more junior crews. One size does not fit all.

There may be parts of your venues that can safely be used and other parts that may not.

As far as your legal liabilities are concerned, the simple answer is that to have a liability there must be a foreseeable risk (a risk that you should have foreseen, whether you did in fact foresee it or not). If red boards, etc. are displayed then it would be difficult to argue that there was not a foreseeable risk. You may be liable if the level of care you showed fell below the standard that a reasonable person would find reasonable. In this case it would help if you could document your decisions (e.g. the risk assessment) then you will be able to show that you took at least reasonable care.

There is no simple answer but the challenge for all safety advisers is to find a safe way that people can enjoy the sport rather than simply say "no, you cannot do that". However, it is not always possible to find a safe way.

Articles on the British Rowing website

In the last month the communications team have published articles on [Cold Water Kills](#) and [Rowing with Asthma](#).

What should you do if you find a dead body?

The CRSA wrote to say that some of their older juniors and some adults were involved in the discovery of a dead body in the river, close to the club. Police and Ambulance were called by a bystander. The ambulance crew took time to give a welfare talk to the junior who had had to turn into the boat house close by. The club's junior coordinator also followed up with call to all parents of the crew and the seniors. They intended to follow up again a few days later. The CRSA asked whether we have a protocol on what to do if a body is discovered.

The response was that it was good of the Ambulance staff to take time to talk to your members. We do not have a protocol explaining what to do if a rower finds a dead body in the water. This is a very rare event. It is more usual to find people in distress in the water and to rescue them. About half the UK drownings are due to suicide and many attempts are not successful.

There is information about the trauma associated with finding a dead body [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), and information on PTSD [here](#). Please ensure that someone (friends, parents, other rowers, etc.) keeps an eye on the people involved and checks for signs of mental trauma (PTSD, depression, etc. as described in the links above) and acts accordingly. This is one of those times when it can be harmful not to act in a timely manner.

If you are sure that the person is dead and is not recoverable (if the body is decomposed, mutilated, bloated, etc.) then leave it alone and call 999. Leave the recovery to the Emergency Service. Move other people away from the incident, as best you can, and do not let people stare at it. If the tide is moving it around then track its progress.

If the body looks "fresh" (e.g. if you saw the person enter the water alive) then it may be possible to bring it ashore and try to resuscitate it. Start performing CPR as soon as you can and use your AED. Perform CPR in relays as individuals delivering it soon become tired.

A British Rowing Safeguarding colleague added the following:-

My deepest condolences for the unfortunate experience, but I note you have covered many of the steps we would have recommended. The only additional piece I could add is that we have a list of charities helplines and organisations that provide support for young people and adults that you may wish to pass on - and these are found at the bottom of our Supporting Positive Mental Health webpage: <https://www.britishrowing.org/mental-health/>.

Obsolete versions of RowSafe

My communications colleagues have kindly removed links to obsolete versions of RowSafe from the British Rowing website. If you need access to any obsolete versions then please let me know.

Safety Review at a School Rowing Club

A draft report has been provided to the school, this provides feedback and includes some recommendations for the club to consider. The report will be finalised once feedback from the club has been received.

Minimum Temperature for Rowing

We were asked whether there is a minimum water temperature below which you should train in a gym. My response as a general rule, we do not set limits but we do offer advice. It is up to the clubs and their rowers to make decisions.

We do not normally row on ice or when there is ice on the water. I have rowed into thin ice and it is a strange experience; not one that I would choose to repeat.

It all depends on the club's assessment of risk and the steps it has taken to prevent immersion and to rescue and care for people if they fall in.

If the club are using crew boats (4s and 8s) and the crews are properly dressed and if the outing is short and relatively intense (no sitting around) then it should be safe. Having a launch on the water just in case.... would also help. It would not be a good idea to put people new to rowing afloat when it is cold as they may not be able to keep warm by working hard.

If the water is rough (risk of splashing or even swamping) or the wind is strong (risk of wind chill) then it would probably be best to stay ashore.

Extra care is needed with small juniors who have a low body mass; they chill quickly.

Nobody should ever be put under pressure to do something that they do not feel comfortable doing, so the club should always offer indoor rowing, or some other form of exercise, as an alternative to going afloat, when it is cold.

Training Material from British Canoeing

British Canoeing recently launched the Paddlers Code which shares guidance on enjoying waterways responsibly and safely. There is a video [here](#), and further information [here](#). It is pleasing to see the reference to passing others on the right (about 3:05 in the video) and the section of the Respect Poster that says "Give other users space, avoid lingering and causing a disturbance. Pass others on the right hand side".

British Canoeing has also produced a Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP) Safer course. This is described [here](#) where it says:-

As part of our work in providing educational resources and programmes for paddlers, British Canoeing Awarding Body has developed a SUP Safer course aimed at supporting those new or relatively new to Stand Up Paddleboarding. The practical four-hour programme is designed to raise awareness of the inherent risks, and providing safety frameworks so they can enjoy their time on the water.

The course consists of four sessions. Session 3 is on planning and contains the following:-

Explain the importance that they keep a watchful eye and ear out for hazards, keeping away from potential issues, e.g. weirs, fallen trees, other water users (rowers, fisherman, motor craft, etc.).

Please take care to return the compliment.

Ocean Rowing for Charity

I was asked about ocean rowing by a member of a university rowing club. The club are keen to raise funds for men with mental health struggles and have completed a 24 hour Rowerthon consisting of teams of 6 who rowed in split shifts throughout the 24 hours. They are currently thinking of rowing across the English Channel. They wanted "to team up with a professional organization and learn about rowing ocean rowing".

The response was that my first involvement with Ocean Rowing was to assist in the Marine Accident Investigation Branch's investigation into an Ocean Rowing fatality in the mid-Atlantic. The report can be found [here](#). I do not regard Ocean Rowing as a sensible activity and would not encourage anyone to do it.

As a result of this investigation, we were requested to provide some guidance on Ocean Rowing safety. This can be found in section 10.3 of [RowSafe](#).

In my view Ocean Rowing is not part of British Rowing's remit (this is a personal view and one that I would recommend if asked).

The idea of rowing across the English Channel has some merit but it will be difficult to do this in such a way that you can make a financial contribution to a charity. Some years ago I coached a crew of schoolboys, who had no previous rowing experience, to row across the English Channel. They did so in a sliding seat Celtic Longboat and became the youngest crew ever to row across the Channel.

Please be aware that the "*The Dover Strait is the world's busiest shipping lane. 500-600 ships a day pass through the narrow strait between the UK and France*" (see [here](#)). It has an eastbound and a westbound Traffic Separation scheme and a "central reservation". Rowing across is a bit like running across a busy motorway. For this reason rowing boats must be escorted and this costs money. You will need permission from the French government to land in France and may also have problems with the UK Border Force when you return.

British Rowing has indoor rowing long distance challenges (see [here](#)). These may be more suitable and will be safer.

I have heard of long distance indoor rowing relays in Supermarkets (accompanied by charity collections). There is more information [here](#) and [here](#). Please consider this.