Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

June 2023

Stephen Worley
Vital life support provided by a young rower

An 18-year-old rower and his father were walking towards their rowing club when they encountered a man who was on the ground with another man kneeling next to his head. There were two ladies nearby, one of whom was on the phone. The father thought that it was a jogger who had taken a fall. The son said that they should stop and see if they can help. It was the son who reminded his father that he was first aid trained.

As they approached the man, it became obvious that it was more serious than a fall. The man on the ground was lifeless, and his eyes were open, unblinking. The other man was talking to him trying to get a response, but there was none. The lady was on the phone to the emergency services.

The young rower calmly explained he had first aid training and completed the initial checks. Undeterred by no signs of life, he repositioned the man and started CPR. The lady on the phone explained what was happening and put it on speaker. The emergency operator started counting. The young rower’s timings were correct. The operator then asked the young rower to count out loud and he did so for her peace of mind.

The ambulance arrived and the Paramedics took over. The ambulance defibrillator was deployed, and the man had a shockable VF rhythm. A First Responder, who is also a member of the Rowing Club, worked with the ambulance technicians and achieved a return of circulation and unassisted breathing. The man remained stable when moved to the ambulance. It is understood he was to be transferred to Hospital.

The young rower should be congratulated for his prompt and effective action. I have nominated him for an award.

Please encourage everyone to learn how to perform CPR either through face-to-face training or the use of online training such as the Resuscitation Council UK’s Lifesaver (life-saver.org.uk).

Incidents Reported in June

Some good news

In one Region, the results of boat inspections at competitions are reported using the Incident Reporting system. This is Best Practice.

At a recent competition 17 boats were selected at random for checking and 44 boats had a full heel restraint check. For the first time since random checking was initiated, no faults were found. Eighteen lifejackets were checked and the only fault that was detected was the lack of crutch straps on one lifejacket.

Waterborne diseases

Last month I reported that there had been many reported waterborne diseases. This continued into early June, mainly on the Thames, but there have been no such reports in the second half of the month. It is strongly suspected that at least some of them were caused by sewage in the water.

Larger boats capsize too

An 8 capsized as the crew were boating and all leaned out.

This report contains safety guidance. Please read our safety message and disclaimer.
Take care in launches

Several rowers were undertaking RYA Level 2 Powerboat training at an accredited RYA centre. The instructor had previously practised with the 3 trainees a high-speed emergency stop that involved driving at high speed then throttling back to neutral and immediately spinning the steering wheel hard to complete a sharp, full lock turn to bring the boat to a standstill pointing back the way it had come. This is no longer the approved technique.

The next exercise was to complete a man-overboard drill with all three trainees in the boat, one driving, one sitting on the passenger seat behind the driver, and one on the inflatable tube of the RIB adjacent to the passenger seat with the dummy to throw in. The instructor was sitting in the bow on the tube near the driver with the kill cord around his leg.

The trainee, who was sitting on the inflatable tube with the dummy threw the dummy in and reached to hold the loop behind the passenger seat and the rope running around the tube. He then shouted man-overboard with no pause after the throw. The boat turned and the trainee was thrown into the water. He was struck on the shoulder by the propeller and suffered significant injuries.

According to the Incident Report, at this time, the instructor's attention was focussed on his mobile phone as he was trying to measure the boat speed even though he was in control of the kill cord.

The casualty was rescued from the water and taken ashore where he was treated with First Aid until the ambulance arrived.

The casualty was lucky in so far as if the propeller had struck him on the neck or head then the injuries could have been far more serious.

The training centre reported this incident to the RYA. I discussed this incident with the RYA Chief Instructor, Power, and provided her with a copy of the British Rowing Incident Report. The Chief Instructor will conduct her own investigation and share the learning with RYA Training Centres.

Safety launches are there to keep people safe

There was a report of safety launches being used to for the delivery of paperwork. This took them away from their correct safety function. However, tempting as it is, please do not interfere with the correct function of safety launches. Their crews have a more important job to do.
**Take extra care when overtaking**

Two 2x's collided head on. One was on the correct side of the waterway and the other had strayed across to the incorrect side when overtaking a 1x. When overtaking, please ensure that you look ahead more carefully and more frequently than you otherwise would. There continue to be too many head on collisions in the middle of waterways. Unless you row in a place where it would be correct to be there, please stay away from the middle of waterways. If you have to row towards the middle, then please do so with great care and return to the correct position as soon as you can.

**Keep a good lookout ahead even if you are on the correct side**

A junior in a 1x was rowing upstream and was pushed towards the middle of the waterway by light winds. A 2x was rowing downstream and also moved towards the centre of the waterway after a corner to overtake a slower boat.

Both boats came towards each other and attempted to stop and avoid the collision. The blades clashed, causing the junior sculler to capsize. The crew of the 2x took hold of the 1x's boat and steadied it whilst the junior got back in.

Please advise crews to keep a better lookout and think about steering closer to the edge of the waterway and being extra careful when overtaking. They were also advised that a keeping a good look out takes precedence over any “pieces”.

**Take care when doing “pieces”**

The bow steers of a 4x sought to prolong the three-quarter pressure paddle when it reached smooth water as the conditions were perfect. This required the 4x to move across the river where it collided with a 4x from another club who were on the correct side. Both bow scullers were injured.

However, tempting as it is not to do so, it is important to keep a good lookout and be considerate of other water users.

**Take care of your young rowers**

A Junior beginners crew was on the water with a coach in a launch. While stationary a man sitting on a bench near them started speaking to them in an aggressive tone and he was reportedly shouting not very nice things at them. The coach approached the boat and instructed the juniors to not engage with the man and continued with the training avoiding that side of the dock.

The coach subsequently reinforced the message not to engage with people who behave in this way. The training continued for a short while, away from the area near to where the man was sitting.

In another incident at the same club two 4x+s with beginner juniors were on the water with a coach in a launch. While rowing underneath a bridge, a group of youths threw rocks at the boats and launch. None of the rowers or the coach were injured and there was no damage to equipment. A police report was filed, and the club's committee was informed.

Club members were advised to report any incidents to the CRSA and file a report to the Police.
Take care of adult rowers too

There was an incident in which three adult crews getting ready to go out but a group of five or six teenagers were sitting on the slipway and were aggressive when we asked to move. Eventually they did move to sit around the side of the club.

While the rowers were out on the water, they youths hid trestles and threw one in the water.

When the rowers returned, they again had to ask the youths to move but they were shouting, swearing, threatening violence.

One girl threw a beer bottle at the slipway whilst there was a boat and crew on it. The bottle smashed and a piece of glass hit a rower in the leg and caused a cut and small bleed.

The incident was reported to the police.

Unfortunately, anti-social behaviour is not uncommon at this time of year. A Safety Alert, “Coping with the behaviour of others” has been issued and a copy will be circulated with this report.

Boats travel a considerable distance in a short time

The crew of a 2x wanted to warm up prior to the start of a race and rowed about 700m upstream of the start marshal to a convenient place. All the other competing boats appeared to have remained within in the Marshalling Area.

The 2x lined up in the centre of the waterway for a practice regatta start of 15 strokes. Before commencing the start, the bow rower took a final look and observed another 2x approximately 350 to 400m downstream. This was thought to be stationary, spinning in the river and intending to return the Marshalling Area.

The 2x then executed a downstream practice start following a straight course without having another look ahead. On the 14th stroke of the start the 2x’s leading rigger collided, at full racing speed, in the centre of the waterway, with the leading rigger of the other 2x. This caused injury and boat damage.

Please understand that when two boats are travelling in opposite directions, at speed, then the distance between them reduces very rapidly. It is important to maintain a good lookout ahead even when preparing for racing.

Take care to stay hydrated

There was a report of a rower feeling the effects of the glorious sunshine combined with the effects of two races (heat and final). After putting their boat away, they had to lie down near the entrance of the boat shed. Fortunately, they were able to be assisted by the other members of their crew, were able to get first aid from the organisers of the competition and were able to make a swift and full recovery.

Please carry water and drink it when needed. Dehydration is easy to avoid.

This report contains safety guidance. Please read our safety message and disclaimer.
Take care to protect young rowers from traumatic events

A member of the public slipped on the bank opposite a rowing club, fell in the water and went straight under. A coach cycling by witnessed the incident and called for help. The person did not resurface and disappeared. Emergency services were called immediately and were on the scene around ten minutes later.

A body was subsequently recovered but this was not seen by the juniors. When the juniors came off the water their coaches moved them swiftly into the boathouse and home. They did see the emergency services at work.

The club has offered counselling and given information including the location of the British Rowing Mental Health advice. No one has requested support. All the parents of the juniors were notified by the Club Welfare Officer and support was offered.

Unfortunately, events of this type are not as rare as we would hope. Rowers and their clubs in the UK are involved with several drownings, or potential drownings, or rescues of people who would otherwise have drowned each year. About 40% of the drownings each year in the UK are caused by people committing suicide, this amounts to about 260 cases.

Take care when strapping boats to trailers

A boat trailer was returning from a competition and all boats were checked and secure prior to leaving. The boats were rechecked after they had been driven a few miles; they were securely strapped to the trailer.

There was a 4x on the top rack and a 2x beneath it. Whilst travelling along a motorway the driver saw, in the rear-view mirror, that the 4x was slipping from the trailer, there was no indication that the load was insecure prior to this point. The trailer was stopped but the boat was broken into two pieces. The largest piece was on the hard shoulder and smaller piece was on the central reservation. There was no impact on other road users. Traffic was slowed and the pieces were recovered. The 2x was damaged by the falling 4x.

Both boats were badly damaged with the 4x being a write off, this is a new boat which is only a few months old.

The club is reviewing its methods of tying boats to trailers. The following advice was provided:

There are several videos on YouTube showing how to tie a boat to a trailer (search for "tying a rowing boat on a trailer"). The end of this one How to tie a rowing shell onto a trailer - YouTube  is particularly interesting.

Consider adding a longitudinal strap between a stretcher and a trailer arm to prevent the movement of tapered sections of boats where, if the boat moves either forward or backward on the trailer, then the tension would be released (i.e., where the boat will move so that the section of boat under the strap will be narrower than it was).

In another incident a trailer carrying four coastal quads was being towed. All the boats had been secured with tie down straps and these had been checked for tightness by the driver and co-driver before departure.

During the journey the boats moved slightly. Ultimately the bow of one boat on the top rack crept right to the outer edge of the support arm, and at this point the strap unhooked. Fortunately, this was spotted, and the vehicle pulled over so the drivers could reposition.

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and re-secure the boats. If this hadn’t been spotted, the boat would have fallen off and been destroyed.

All boats were re-secured, ensuring that the tiedown strap was wrapped around a vertical post of the trailer frame. This ensured that the boats were both tied down securely to the rack arm and to the centre of the trailer. There was no further movement detected for the remainder of the journey.

**Transport of boats on cars**

A driver was stopped by the Police when transporting a 2x on the roof of their car. The driver showed the British Rowing and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) leaflet to the Police officers, but they did not accept it. The leaflet is published on the British Rowing website [here](#). The driver asked whether this leaflet is still valid. I believe that it still is.

The guidance is based on the requirements of is Regulation 82(7) of [The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986](#). The relevant table is reproduced in Appendix 1 below.

It is not possible to say here whether the transport arrangements in this case did, in fact, comply with these requirements but I believe that the guidance in the leaflet is correct and that the legal requirements have not changed. If you think that they have then please let me know; write to safety@britishrowing.org.

**Support for USRowing**

The Chair of the USRowing Safety Committee wrote to British Rowing and said that she is a great admirer of all our hard work, and, like us, they continually work to keep rowers and coaches safe.

They are in the process of revamping much of their material and have started to create a comprehensive Safety Manual. She thought that we have done a stellar job in creating RowSafe, and wondered whether collaboration was possible.

I replied to assure her that hers was not the first rowing NGB to ask to be able to use our material and the answer has always been “yes, of course you can, what else can we do to help you?” She would be very welcome to all the help that we can provide.

Our primary source of guidance and advice is RowSafe. This is freely available on the British Rowing website. I provided a word version as this is easier to work with. We keep RowSafe up to date but avoid confusing users with frequent updates. The updated version is issued once a year in April.

I also explained that we have this report each month and occasionally produce Safety Alerts. I have included her in the distribution.

Most importantly, we have developed a culture of openness, transparency and sharing in relation to rowing safety and most clubs routinely provide reports on the incidents that they have been involved in. This is truly no-fault reporting; we are not interested in fault or blame. We use this information in many ways including sharing the learning that comes from understanding the causes of these incidents. We analyse the incidents by cause and produce a report each year; the latest one can be found at [PowerPoint Presentation](http://britishrowing.org).
Work with British Canoeing

There was an incident in which a 4+ collided with a kayaker in a K1, hitting the kayaker in the face causing concussion of her two front teeth. She fears that she may lose those teeth. The kayaker states that at the time of the collision she was on the correct side of the waterway but that the rowing boat was on the wrong side.

In the Incident Report, the club stated: -

*Our 4+ was rowing upstream at a slow pace. A single kayak was in the cox’s blind spot, and travelling in the opposite direction in an unexpectedly central position on the river. 2 seat’s blade then collided with the kayaker in the face. The impact also resulted in the capsize of the kayak.*

The reference to the cox’s blind spot is troubling. The importance of operating safely and maintaining a good lookout is paramount to all activities on the water. If a cox (or steers) does not know what is in front of them then they should stop.

Section 5.1. of RowSafe on Steering and Navigation states –

**Expectations**

*Coxes and Steers* 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. Steers should consider using a head mounted mirror or similar device.

It can never be acceptable for any boat to continue moving when the person steering does not know what is ahead.

There has also been concern expressed by a British Canoeing regional Safety Officer that rowing coaching launches operate at speeds above the local speed limit and create excessive wash. The response was that in areas where the Navigation Authority have imposed speed limits on motorised vessels, there are often special dispensations for rowing coaching launches. For example, the Port of London Authority, in its Tideway Code, states:

**Rowing limits**

*Rowing coaching launches have a special dispensation from the PLA to exceed the speed limit but only when directly coaching a crew.*

At all other times coaching launches are limited to 8 knots and should navigate to the starboard side of the channel.

*The speed limit applies if a coach becomes separated from their crew, and they must not exceed 8 knots when attempting to catch-up with a crew.*

Similarly, coaches must proceed with extreme caution and within the speed limit behind aits (islands in the river).

This dispensation is necessary in order for coaching launches to keep up with rowing boats as they can move considerably faster than the normal speed limit for motorboats. However, launch drivers should take care not to abuse this privilege and ensure that they do not create excessive wash.

There was also concern expressed that launch drivers may not be qualified. The response was that many Navigation Authorities also require operators of motor launches to be qualified to RYA Level 2 Powerboat. Our guidance simply advises that they should be competent. The Health and Safety Executive defines competence [here](#), as follows: -
Competence can be described as **the combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely.** Other factors, such as attitude and physical ability, can also affect someone’s competence.

Many people have been driving launches for years and are competent to do so even though they may not be qualified.

Information was also shared on other incidents including one where, near the landing stage, there was an incident involving a quad and a group of kayakers. A 4x was moving upstream while the kayakers, who were beginners, were departing from the landing stage and paddling on the incorrect side of the waterway. The rowing club provided guidance to the kayakers regarding the presence of river traffic and instructed them on the appropriate direction for kayaking.

How do we keep a junior with their own boat safe?

The coaches at a club are concerned about a junior who wants to use his private 1x out of session hours on the stretch of river where they operate. They are not happy that the junior member bringing their own boat and rows alone on the river without a member of club being present. The river is free to use for everyone and there is nothing stopping them from doing this. They wondered if they had a duty of care to their junior members who may row outside of session hours. The club also asked about their liability.

The response was that the club may have a rule stating that junior members are not permitted to go afloat unless there is a coach present. If the club does not already have that rule, then it should check its risk assessment and determine whether it should institute this rule.

Safeguarding considerations require that juniors (children below the age of 18) must be supervised by adults at all times that they are at the club. If you need chapter and verse on this, then let me know. This also supports the logic of a club rule.

If the junior launches from club premises, then the club is in a strong position to influence the junior’s actions. If the junior launches from somewhere else, then the club can still have the rule. In either case way, the junior’s continued membership of the club is conditional on him complying with club rules. If the junior wants to enter competitions, then he or she must be a member of a club. (I have assumed that it is a boy, if not then please change "he" to "she").

Liability considerations are far more difficult. If the club knows that a member is doing something dangerous and does nothing, then it would not be in a strong position to contest liability although any harm he comes to will be the result of the member’s actions so the club should not have too much liability. If the club has a rule, then this will help, providing that rule is enforced fairly. It is no good having a rule that the club knows that lots of people do not comply with.
Juniors using gyms

I was asked for information on 16-year-olds using gyms and the level of supervision that would be appropriate and how is “supervision” defined.

The response was that we do not have specific safety advice on the use of gyms by juniors but Chapter 11 of RowSafe deals with Land Training and section 11.2 deals with Gym Training. One of the key messages here is "if it hurts then stop".

As young people’s bodies develop, their muscle development is in advance of their skeletal development. In other words, their muscles can exert forces that will overload their bones and joints. Injuries to joints are a real risk. This risk can be countered by ensuring that the juniors are coached to use good lifting technique and do not try to lift weights that are too heavy for them. The duration of training should also be controlled. It may be best to stick to bodyweight exercises (see below).

There is information that may be relevant in the videos Changing Young Lives Through Coaching - YouTube (this may be of general interest) and British Rowing Workout Wednesday #4 - Core Workout - YouTube (this deals with bodyweight core workout exercises). There is further relevant information in How-Much-How-Often-210219.pdf (britishrowing.org). This document provides guidance from British Rowing around good practice for what is appropriate training at different stages in a rower’s development.

There is relevant information on Safeguarding and Supervision in the British-Rowing-Safeguarding-Handbook-3-Club-training-and-competition-guidance-Covid-guidance-template.pdf (britishrowing.org). This does not deal with Gym use specifically but does contain information about supervision of children in changing rooms and on trips. Please remember that 16-year-olds are still children and should be supervised at all times when rowing or on club premises or undertaking other activities at or near the club. They remain children until their 18th birthday.

This advice: -

"Coaches working with children should ensure that they do not work in isolation, therefore there should be at least two adults available when coaching children and young people, in accordance with CPSU guidelines. This is to protect both the child, as well as the coach, especially so that, in case of an accident or injury there is always someone available to supervise the remaining children."

...can be found in the British-Rowing-Safeguarding-Children-and-Young-People-Policy-June-2021-2.pdf (britishrowing.org).

I cannot find a definition of "supervision" but the following information can be found here CPSU sample code of conduct for staff and volunteers (thecpsu.org.uk)

As a member of staff or a volunteer at our club or activity, we'd like you to: 

- implement our safeguarding policy and procedures
- report any concerns about or allegations of abuse or poor practice to our welfare officer
- listen to any concerns that parents or young people might have
- consider your behaviour - do not engage in any behaviour that constitutes any form of abuse
- respect your position of trust and maintain appropriate boundaries and relationships with young people. Engaging in sexual behaviour with any child under the age of 16 is illegal
- keep any coaching and safeguarding training up to date

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✓ keep children in your sessions safe by supervising appropriately, using safe methods and techniques and by putting children’s safety first
✓ make sure you’ve got appropriate staffing ratios of adult to participant before the session begins
✓ ensure equipment is fit for purpose, safe to use and accessible
✓ respect children’s trust and rights whilst being honest and open with them
✓ champion everyone’s right to take part and celebrate difference in our club or by not discriminating against anyone, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or ability
✓ stop play if an injury happens, administer minor first aid and call for help when necessary
✓ use constructive and positive methods of developing children’s skills, without humiliating or harming them
✓ behave appropriately online in accordance with our online safety and acceptable use policy
✓ challenge and address instances of poor, negative, aggressive, or bullying behaviour amongst young people
✓ lead by example when it comes to good sportsmanship, positive behaviour and commitment to the sport
✓ develop positive relationships with parents and catch up with them regularly about their child’s development
✓ make our club a friendly and welcoming place to be

For the purposes of supervision in gyms, I believe that the people supervising should be present at all times that the children are in the gym and that they should be in control of the children’s activities and behaviour. It would be best if they are also coaches knowledgeable about strength and conditioning exercises so that they can lead the activities and keep the children safe.

There was a subsequent question as to whether it would be appropriate the junior to do weight training in a small gym when supervised by a coach on the mezzanine floor above. The response was that I feel that the junior should be supervised by someone who is able to intervene if something is unsafe. However, this could be done by someone who is not qualified but understands what to look out for.

Safety in Club Premises

Guidance on Safety in Club Premises was originally published in twelve separate documents but has recently been reformulated into a single document to make it consistent with the British Rowing Club Guides. The content has not changed. It covers the following topics:

1. Work at Height
2. Fire arrangements
3. Safety of electrical equipment and installations
4. Gas safety including LPG and LNG
5. Hazardous chemicals
6. Storage of petrol
7. Asbestos in the building structure
8. Lifting equipment
9. Avoidance of slips, trips, and falls
10. Legionnaires disease
11. Food Safety and
12. Radio licensing

This Club Guide is available [here].
Defibrillator advice

A club is in the process of having an Automated External Defibrillator installed in the Boat Club and someone raised an interesting question - would a semi-automatic AED be better than a fully automatic one due to the added water element?

The response was that this does not have anything to do with water. A fully automatic defibrillator will give a warning and then deliver a shock automatically. This is suitable for use in health care situations by health care professionals.

Semi-automatic defibrillators will say that a shock is needed but will only deliver that shock when the operator presses the button (following the instruction to do so). This gives the operator the opportunity to check that nobody is touching the casualty.

Water is not a big issue. Even if the casualty is lying in a small amount of water (a few centimetres or so), the defibrillator will still be effective. Providing the pads are making good contact with bare skin (dry the skin with the towel provided and, if the casualty is very hairy, shave the skin with the razor provided) then the defibrillator can still be effective.

Please remember that the shock passes directly from one pad to the other. If the pads are correctly positioned, then the shock will pass through the heart.

Being prepared for a terrorist incident

Following a competition that was completed peacefully, someone wrote to comment on the need to consider how a competition could prepare for a terrorist event. This followed an event where a local boy had had his bike stolen from him a few days prior to the competition but in the same location, by three other boys, one of whom threatened him with a machete.

My response was that there will be legislation covering planning for terrorist activities at events. This is known now as Martyn’s law and is in response to the Manchester Arena bombing and the subsequent enquiry. There is more information here Martyn’s Law progresses as government publishes draft legislation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

There is some doubt whether a "regatta in a field" would be covered by this legislation. In its current version the premises where the competition occurs would be subject to these requirements if the premises primarily comprise land in the open air, and access to the premises by a member of the public is by express permission only (whether or not on payment). Even if these requirements do not apply then it would be prudent to be aware of them and consider how this risk can be managed.

The new legislation, when it is enacted, should be accompanied by guidance and other supporting material. At least one Local Authority has provided training for event organisers. However, I feel that this was premature because at that time the legislation was at an earlier stage and did not contain much detail.
Appendix 1

Regulation 82(7) of The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986.

(7) Subject to the following provisions of this regulation no person shall use, or cause or permit to be used, on a road a vehicle, not being a straddle carrier, carrying a load or fitted with a special appliance or apparatus if the load, appliance or apparatus has a forward projection of a length specified in an item in column 2 of the Table, or rearward projection of a length specified in an item in column 3, unless the conditions specified in that item in column 4 are complied with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Length of forward projection</th>
<th>Length of rearward projection</th>
<th>Conditions to be complied with</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exceeding 1 m but not exceeding 2 m</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Para 4 of Schedule 12</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Exceeding 2 m but not exceeding 3.05 m</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Exceeding 3.05 m</td>
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<td>Para 1 and 4 of Schedule 12</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Exceeding 3.05 m</td>
<td>Para 1 and 4 of Schedule 12</td>
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Schedule 12 of the Regulations relate to additional requirements. The paras referred to are:

1. Advance notice to Police
2. Attendants
3. Marking of longer projections
4. Marking of shorter projections

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