



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

October 2023

Stephen Worley

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Tragic death of a rower in a weir accident

Two experienced masters rowers aged about 40 in a 2x were swept over a weir near their club. One was rescued and the other sadly died.

The club is positioned so that the rowers have to row past the mouth of the weir as they row away from the Rowing Club.



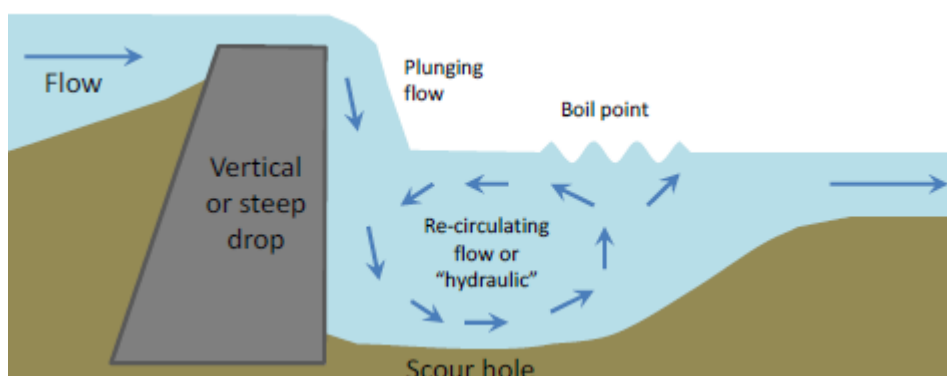
The weir has three levels.



The boat and crew were swept over the first weir and the crew got free from the boat in the upper pool. They were able to stand in the upper pool. The boat was swept away but was later recovered, damaged.

Someone at the club called the emergency services and the Fire and Rescue service attended together with an Ambulance. One of the rowers was rescued but the other was swept away downstream before he could be rescued. His body was later recovered downstream.

There is information about flow over weirs in my [August 2023 Monthly Report](#). This includes the following: -



The water is aerated around the “Boil Point” and its effective density is reduced thus reducing buoyancy. Please see the British Rowing [Safety Alert, keep clear of Weirs](#) and the more extensive British Canoeing guidance [Safety at Weirs](#).

Please take care to ensure that your rowers stay well clear of weirs.

Further guidance may be provided when we learn more about this incident.

Fatal Incident involving a coach

A Coach recently lost his life as a result of a cardiac event afloat. He was rowing with a girls Novice 8 because one of the crew had not arrived, it was not unusual for him to do this. The crew was rowing in 4s and 6s at an easy pace, there was no significant physical exertion. The coach collapsed and some people thought that he was having a seizure. I have since been advised that many cardiac arrests look like seizures in their acute phase due to the way the brain reacts to low flow or no flow circulation.

The 8 was accompanied by a coach in a launch and was followed by another 8 also with a coach in a launch. The crew took the boat to the bank. In this area it is easy to beach boats on the bank, the crew did so. The coach was removed from the boat to the bank and CPR was commenced by the accompanying coach. There was no delay. The other coaches at the club and the emergency services (999) were called at the same time by different people. Within minutes additional adults arrived from another coaching launch and from the club. The coaches performed CPR in relays with the assistance of the 999 operator.

Another coach took the girls away.

The Air Ambulance arrived on scene and the doctor and critical care paramedic continued CPR using advanced life support procedures. Sadly they were unsuccessful in restoring a life supporting circulation.

There is advice on what to do if a rower collapses in a boat in the [Safety-Alert-What-to-do-if-a-rower-collapses-in-a-boat.pdf \(britishrowing.org\)](#)

Other Incidents in October

Collision when turning near the rowing club

There was an incident on a river in which a narrow boat collided with a masters I/J 4x that was turning just upstream of a bridge so that it could approach the club pontoon. The crew were all wearing hi viz clothing and the boat was fitted with lights. The narrow boat approached and when it was alongside the pontoon several club members shouted warnings of the impending collision. The narrow boat collided with the 4x causing it to capsize away from the narrow boat. Two members of the crew of the 4x were able to self-rescue but the other two required assistance from a fellow crew member and three club members who jumped into the water and swam to help. The mate on the narrow boat also entered the water to assist in getting a trapped rower free. All the crew and others that entered the water were attended to by three ambulances and two crew members were taken to hospital.

Two crew members had difficulty removing their feet. Please encourage all rowers to check their boats before they go afloat paying particular attention to their heel restraints, Velcro release cords and the size of their shoes.

Take good care of yourself

A rower was doing a 2,000 metre test on an indoor rowing machine after warming up and confirming they were fit and able to take part in their test. After about 500 metres the rower fainted and fell to the side of the machine. One of the coaches caught the rower and lowered them to the ground. The coach covered the athlete and stayed with them, talking to them to confirm they were not in difficulties. The rower was able to sit up after about five minutes.

The rower stated they had low iron levels and were required to take iron supplements which they had forgotten to take that day. They are also having their menstruation which started at the beginning of the week, resulting in lower iron levels than normal. The coaching team have spoken with them about the importance of self-care and to share information.

Please encourage rowers to take good care of themselves and not to undertake strenuous exercise if they are not fully prepared. It is important that they are appropriately fed, hydrated and have taken any required medication.

In another incident an experienced junior rower in a 1x developed breathing difficulties after finishing a 450 m race. A safety boat was close at hand and was able to support the rower ashore. The rower had not taken an inhaler afloat and did not take a puff before going afloat. The rower was advised to practise breathing exercises, rest and take medication in good time before racing again and to take the inhaler in the boat.

In yet another incident a young rower in a 1x became cold and had cramp at a head race. The rower was brought back to the landing stage by a rescue boat, wrapped in a foil blanket. Extra layers of clothing were added, and the rower sat in a warm car before going home with their parents. The rower was spoken to about appropriate clothing and how to remove layers of clothing when in a 1x.

Look after others too

A runner hit their head on the bridge over the towpath, causing a cut that bled profusely. A coach found them, called an ambulance, and returned to the boathouse to find additional supplies to stem the bleeding and to locate a first aider. Club members made the runner as comfortable as they could while waiting for the ambulance, which arrived in under 15 minutes.

Coaches assist the emergency services

The club was notified that a body had been discovered by kayakers. Sometime later a helicopter flew and hovered above the water and many emergency service vehicles gathered nearby. Coaches in two launches were waved over by the emergency services. After a short briefing on of the situation, the coaches were asked to help retrieve the body. They all consented to this, and two members of the emergency services team boarded each launch. An inflatable raft was attached to the side of a launch. Both launches were driven to the location of the body, and it was retrieved onto the inflatable raft. A launch then drove it to the river side where police and other emergency personnel were waiting. The event was discussed, and support was available should. The coaches reported that they are all fine.

Keep a good lookout at all times

A 4x collided at near race speed with the finish line officials launch (the large commercial lake passenger launch) moored about 8 metres away from the outside lane on the finish line. It is reported that the very experienced steerer lost concentration and failed, in the heat of the race to keep a good look out. Please take care to keep a good look out at all times, even when racing.

In another incident a 4x collided with a 1x. It was reported that the 4x travelling at speed, on the wrong side of the river. The 4x's steer person not looking and not aware of what was ahead. There was a bank rider with the 4x but they were filming and also not aware. The 4x responded to shouts and managed to hold it up at the very last minute so the force of impact was somewhat lessened. Please remember that bank riders have responsibilities for the safety of their crews and that steers should be aware of what is ahead.

Take care to use the correct towing vehicle

A member of the public reported that a small car was towing a large rowing boat trailer, this was subsequently reported by the club. This happened because the expected driver was ill, and another vehicle was used. There was also some confusion about the weight of the trailer being used, the club recently had changed from their lightweight trailer to their heavy trailer. Please take care as failure to comply with the trailer towing regulations is both illegal and dangerous. There is more information on boat transport by road [here](#).

Take care to shout a warning

There have been many incidents recently where a warning has been shouted to rowers afloat, often by other rowers afloat to warn them of an impending collision. In many cases the warning was not heard, and the collision was not averted. Please help other rowers by shouting a warning but do not assume that you have been heard. It is also important to stop or take whatever action is needed to avoid the collision. There is further guidance on page 54 of the [Tideway Code](#).

Take extra care if your steering is compromised

A 4x lost its fin on shoals and was instructed to spin and return to the boathouse. It took action to avoid an 8+ and in doing so became entangled on a large mooring buoy. The 4x capsized and the crew was rescued by launches in the vicinity. Please encourage rowers to take extra care if their steering is compromised and keep well clear of all obstructions.

Why do we have lights on boats

There was an incident in which some crews had fitted high powered bicycle lights at the bow and stern of their boat on their boats instead of all-round white navigation lights.

The reason for having lights on boats is to make it easy for others to see that there is a boat there, where it is and which way it is moving, so that they can avoid it. Lights should not be used to illuminate the water ahead so that the crew can see where it is going. Forward facing directional lights cannot be seen when the boat is turning. Please avoid using excessively powerful lights and directional lights.

Take care to ensure that your lights are working

It is reported that a boat did have lights, but one completely ran out of battery towards the end of the session and the other was so dim it was effectively redundant. The club is reviewing their process for charging lights and buying more water-resistant lights. Please remember that fitting lights is not sufficient, crews have to ensure that they are working.

Check your launch too

A launch set off and was waiting for an 8 to leave before following and coaching them. Whilst waiting in a moderate stream the outboard engine stopped and could not be restarted. The launch was caught by the current and pushed back 150 metres onto debris surrounding the piers of the bridge. The launch and driver were towed by another launch away from the bridge.

When the launch was inspected it was discovered that the fuel line to the outboard was kinked and this had stopped fuel reaching the engine causing it to stop and prevent it from restarting. Please remind all launch drivers to check that engines are running properly and that the fuel lines, steering and control cables are not trapped before setting off. Please see the Safety Alert [Launch pre-use checks](#).

Take care with your footwear

A rower wearing “sliders” slipped on mud and fell forwards. This resulted in a cut to their chin and a tear under chin with loose skin. The injury was cleaned by first aiders. A paramedic on site was consulted and a moist dressing was added. The rower was taken to A&E by their parents where the chin was steri-stripped and glued. Please encourage your rowers to wear more appropriate footwear.

Do it yourself

Earlier this year there was an incident where a 2x collided with an extensive tree branch that had fallen into the stream following recent stormy weather. It is reported that the club working party has since cut the trees back as far as possible to reduce the obstruction to the navigation.

Reporting works

There were several reports of the crew of a “guard boat” who tried to intimidate rowers by driving close to them at speed and creating excessive wash. These incidents were reported to the navigation authority and it is understood that the “guard boat” crews have been re-educated.

Another injury on a Powerboat course

In June I reported on an incident in which a rower was injured during RYA Powerboat Level 2 training when he was thrown from the launch and was struck by the propellor. There was a similar incident some months ago, also on a Powerboat Level 2 course when a trainee was thrown from the launch and was struck by the propellor. This was subsequently investigated by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) whose preliminary assessment can be found [here](#).

Wearing lifejackets when racing abroad

I was asked whether British Rowing Insurance would be invalidated if crews rowed abroad in countries where there is no requirement for coxes to wear a life jacket or buoyancy aid.

The response was to refer the insurance question to the membership team and to comment that I can see no reason why a cox would not want to wear one. We recommend, and the rules of racing require, that coxes wear them for their own safety and that of their crew. Just because someone is not required to wear one does not mean that they should not do so.

I would be very worried if I thought that anyone was more concerned about insurance than safety.

Risk Assessment for high river flows

Some members at a club planning to go out with the predicted high river flow. Do we have a risk assessment done for high river flow?

The response is that there is relevant information in Section 9.3 of [RowSafe](#). This provides the basics for a risk assessment of Hazards associated with the water. High flow rates are one of those hazards.

Some of the more powerful crews may be able to cope but others may not. My advice would always be, if in doubt then do not go out. In other words, it is better to be on land wishing you were on the water than to be on the water wishing you were on land.

If there are fixed obstructions on the water (e.g., weirs, moorings, buoys, bridges, etc.) then the risks can easily become intolerable.

Rowing when rivers are high or have been high

There has been significant rainfall in many parts of the UK recently and this may continue or reoccur. This will result in increased river flows that introduce additional hazards. There is advice on these hazards and the appropriate Barriers and Controls to consider in Section 9.3 of RowSafe, “topics covered in risk assessment – the water”.

When water levels are high then debris high on the banks of rivers can float off and cause hazards to rowers. These are often waterlogged and float very low in the water so that they are difficult to see.

Copies of the following Safety Alerts, that are particularly relevant to faster than normal water flows have recently been sent to Club Rowing Safety Advisers.

- [Don't be swept into danger](#)
- [Flow around bends in rivers](#)
- [Keep clear of weirs](#)
- [Is it safe to go afloat alone](#)
- [Rowing in floods](#)

The Science behind Float to Live

This relatively new video ([The Science Behind Float To Live - YouTube](#)) provides background information and explains some of the detail in the Float to Live message. Please review this and share it with anyone you think may be interested.

Safety at Competitions

I was asked for general advice on the improvement of safety at competitions.

The response was that it all starts with the risk assessment, that should provide all the information needed to run the event safely.

It is important that everyone has the information that they need but is not overloaded with information that they do not need. We start this with information for competing clubs. This includes everything relevant from how to find the event to what time does the catering start to when is the first race, etc. If the event is at a "big venue" then all that is needed is a name although it may be necessary to explain which entrance to use. If the location is not well known, then there will need to be more information on its location.

It helps to provide a briefing to the captains of competing clubs when they arrive. They can then brief their members, provide a briefing document to each club captain. This should be double sided on one sheet of A4 and laminated.

Provide information for umpires in large print (some are not as young as they used to be). The print in the program may be too small.

Provide information for marshalls, preferably on one sheet of A4 and laminated. It should tell them where they are supposed to be, what they should do, and how they should communicate. Ensure that they have all the information and equipment that they need. Be clear and specific, bullet pointed lists and a map should be included.

Prepare a Communication Strategy (hierarchy), Safety Plan and Alternative Arrangements (or abandonment) plan. Do not burden with information that they do not need. Provide a subset of the information that they do need. Tell people what they need to know and keep it simple. Provide a brief briefing document so that they do not have to rely on their memory.

It may be necessary to provide information to boat drivers in the same form, some may not need it but you cannot assume that. Umpires' boat drivers can operate under the direction of the umpires.

Do not assume that people will read written instructions. Explain it to them at briefings and issue the written instructions as a reminder or a reference. Remember that the purpose of these documents is to help people to do the right things.

Some of the information is provided on signs, e.g. car park for competitors, park for trailers and towing vehicles, etc.

If there is a designated boat rigging and storage area, then try to keep people out of it. It should be for people rigging, moving, and derigging boats only. Do not put it near to facilities that would attract people (e.g., shelter, toilets, catering outlets, spectator areas, etc.).

How do we manage people who use their own boats?

I was asked for guidance on the racking and use of private members' boats at a recreational club that has members of various ages, experience levels, and abilities. The club has several members who rack private boats at the club and come and go as they see fit and most of them go afloat when there is no one else around.

The question was "Does the club have any responsibility and/or liability for these members and can the committee restrict private boat owners if they feel that they are not experienced enough to go out alone. Is there any British Rowing Guidance on this subject?"

The response was to take the second part of the question first, "*can the committee restrict private boat owners if they feel that they are not experienced enough to go out alone?*" The simple answer is YES.

The club should use its risk assessment to identify the Barriers (to reduce the probability of a hazard causing a hazardous event) and Controls (to reduce the severity of harm caused in such an event) that are needed to ensure that the level of risk is acceptable. Part of this will be to define the club safety rules that its members are expected to comply with in order to keep themselves and others safe.

Club safety rules apply to club members, all of them, it does not matter whether they own the boats or not. Compliance with rules is a condition of club membership. There is support for this in Regulation 11 of the [British Rowing Regulations](#).

Responsibility and liability are always difficult. The club can be expected to act reasonably to keep its members safe. However, there is a voluntary acceptance of risk if anyone chooses to row. Liability is limited to what a reasonable person would think is reasonable. As a general rule, health and safety law and regulations do not apply to sports clubs except to the extent that they are in control of premises and to the extent that they have employees.

The simple answer is that if these people want to be members of your club and use your club's facilities then they have to comply with your club's rules. If they are not prepared to do this then they should be required to remove themselves, and their boats, from your club.

[RowSafe](#) does not deal separately with privately owned boats and club boats. As far as safety is concerned it does not matter who owns the boat.

Questions on Capsize Training

I was asked about the necessity for rowers to complete capsize training and does this apply to all rowers or just those who use 1xs and 2xs (and 2-s). The response was The statement on swimming and floating, etc. can be found in section 3.6 where it says: -

Everyone taking part in rowing should be able to:

- *Float unaided for at least five minutes*

And ideally

- *Swim at least 50 metres in light clothing (rowing kit).*
- *Tread water for at least two minutes.*
- *Swim under water for at least five metres.*

Those rowers who can only float or swim when wearing a buoyancy aid should also wear such an aid, or a lifejacket if coxing, whenever they are afloat.

Section 3.7 of RowSafe deals with Capsize and Recovery. This contains the following: -

Club Officers are expected to:

- *Ensure that all members know what to do in the event of capsize or swamping.*
- *Ensure that all members are aware of the effects of cold-water shock and hypothermia, described in the Cold Water and Hypothermia online module and the Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills.*
- *Promote a higher level of duty of care for junior, beginner and adaptive rowers.*
- *Have policies in place for those who have not been trained, particularly junior, beginner and adaptive rowers. These could, for example, require the wearing of lifejackets or buoyancy aids.*
- *Record Capsize and Recovery training of each member of the club and make these records available to all its coaches.*
- *Complete the Capsize Training for Coaches and Club Officials online learning module. Know what to do in the event of a capsize*
- *Organise Capsize and Recovery training in a local swimming pool or another safe setting to practise:*
 - *Getting free from an inverted boat (including releasing the feet from the shoes).*
 - *Getting on top of the boat, making rescue by launch and buddy rescue easier.*
 - *Getting back into the boat for those who feel capable and confident.*
 - *Lying on top of and paddling a boat (straddle and paddle).*
 - *Calling for help.*
 - *Buddy rescue.*
- *Recovery using a throw line as demonstrated in the British Rowing Man Overboard and Recovery video.*
- *Developing confidence in the boat (balance drills).*
- *Preparing a boat for use in the Capsize and Recovery training making sure that it has:*
 - *Well-sealed buoyancy compartments or added buoyancy.*
 - *No backstays.*
 - *No protruding bolts or other sharp projections.*
 - *Correctly adjusted heel restraints*

This text in [RowSafe](#) contains several hyperlinks.

There is detailed training for Coaches and Club Officials on Row How here [Capsize Drill Training - Coaches and Club Officials: Learning Objectives \(rowhow.org\)](#) Capsize training for Rowers can be found here [Capsize Drill Training - Rowers: Learning Objectives \(rowhow.org\)](#)

Please understand that RowSafe is guidance. It is up to each club to define its own requirements based on its own risk assessment of its own venue.

Someone else wrote to say that that for some years they had held the capsize training in the local pool but were being asked if they could do it in the river.

The response was that there are several aspects to this. Please consider the potential consequences of immersion in river water (and the contamination that may be in it) and draw your own conclusion based on the condition of the river in the place where you row. In view of recent pollution incidents, you should take the risks of immersion in your river into account before proceeding.

At this time of year, the water should not be very cold, but it is still cold enough to cause harm, both immediately following immersion and later. If the stream is significant then there is a risk of a rower being swept downstream away from assistance. There is also the problem that it can be difficult to see a person in the water in a river whereas this is easy in a swimming pool. If they need assistance in a swimming pool, then this can be provided immediately; it is not so easy in the river.