



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

April 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Rowers to the Rescue

A member of the public appeared to have jumped off a bridge into a river. They were not able to swim and appeared to be inebriated. The crew of a 2x arrived to find a person in the water who was struggling so they stopped to help.

The person was unable to hold onto the boat and sank below the water. The rower at stroke entered the water to assist but was unable to find the person. The rower at bow then entered the water and was able to bring the person to the surface and tow them to the bank. They then ensured the person was breathing and in a safe location with the assistance of an unknown bystander. The rower at stroke recovered the boat to the bank.

Whilst this was happening, a member of the public called the emergency services. The person regained consciousness before the emergency services arrived and was kept away from the water by several bystanders (they displayed aggression and lack of control of their movements). The emergency services arrived and attended to the person. The rowers re-entered their boat and rowed back to their club.

Both rowers will be nominated for Royal Humane Society Awards.

In another incident a coach was attempting to restart their launch motor when they noticed a kayaker paddling upstream. The kayaker was clearly competent, and the coach had seen them many times before. The launch was stationary with engine failure and the coach was trying to restart it. There was a motorised passenger vessel moving slowly downstream.

The kayak capsized, without external interference, at about 20 metres from the launch. The kayak was about two metres from the bank in greater than 1.5 metres depth of water.

After the capsize, the coach saw the kayaker struggling for about ten seconds, attempting to get out of the boat. The kayaker's head was above water. The kayaker managed to lift themselves partially on top of the kayak which was floating well. The coach continued to try to start the motor.

About 20 seconds later the coach checked again and saw that the kayaker was no longer on top of the kayak but was floating face down in the water. At that time the motorised passenger vessel was only about three metres away and the coach was about 20 metres away.

The coach took about ten seconds to remove their shoes, trousers, and shirt and check their buoyancy aid and then swam to the kayaker. On arrival it was clear that the kayaker was unconscious. The coach pulled the kayaker to the bank keeping their head above water. The coach requested help from the motorised passenger vessel, but none was forthcoming. The coach then managed to get the kayaker onto the bank. The kayaker remained unconscious. The coach started to give rescue breaths and was joined, about 30 seconds later, by a passenger from the motorised passenger vessel who was an unknown, off duty, doctor. The doctor started to deliver CPR. Another unknown person joined them helping with CPR. The three of them continued to deliver CPR in relays until an ambulance arrived and the crew took over. The kayaker remained unconscious.

It is understood that the kayaker lost his life later that day in hospital with their spouse by their side. The kayaker was a prominent member of Bristol Canoe Club, and the club was very grateful for the attempts by everyone at the scene to save them. They have also expressed their gratitude to the coach.

The coach received great emotional support from their club, particularly from the coaches of juniors.

The coach will be nominated for a Royal Humane Society Award.

Incidents Reported in April

Always keep well clear of Dove Pier (and other similar obstructions)

A L2R 8+ crossed the river to return to the club pontoon. As they came alongside the pier, they were being swept towards it in spite of their coach's instructions for them to keep clear. They collided with a moored houseboat and were held there by the stream. The coach called the Coastguard and was told that a lifeboat was on its way. The boat stayed upright throughout the incident and thankfully, nobody went into the water.

The Lifeboat arrived and proceeded very skilfully to disembark the crew and return them to the pontoon. The Thames fireboat which happened to be nearby, also attended and recovered the boat.

There are several photographs and videos of the rescue, this is a photo extracted from one of the videos: -



Dove Pier is a well-known hazard to rowers who should take great care to keep well clear. In October 2016 there was a similar incident, there is a report here [LESSONS FOR ROWERS | TRRC](#). This is a well-known hazard that can be avoided.

The club were reminded of the [Safety-Alert-People-new-to-rowing-may-hesitate-1.pdf](#) and [Safety-Alert-Flow-around-bends-in-rivers.pdf](#).

Take care to check that your kill cords work

A coach was about to drive a launch but, when they checked, they found that the outboard did not stop when the kill cord was removed. Further checks showed that the outboard would not stop when the ignition key was turned off. They eventually stopped the outboard by disconnecting the fuel supply. The launch was taken out of service pending repairs.

Kill cords are critical safety devices, please check that they work as they should on your launches.

[This report contains safety guidance. Please read our safety message and disclaimer.](#)

Coping with antisocial behaviour

We are approaching the time of year when anti-social behaviour becomes more significant. In April there were reports of abuse of rowers by people both on land and on the water. The following incidents, of antisocial behaviour on land, were reported: -

- A full can of coke was thrown at an 8+ from the top of the bridge onto the boat. It landed on the boat next the 5 seat within a foot of the rower's head. Thankfully it bounced off the boat, so no real damage was done and the crew carried on rowing.
- A member of the public, on a bridge, spat at a rower who was passing under the bridge. They missed. There was no confrontation as the rower continued silently, whilst being shocked and angry.
- Crews were waiting in a lock basin when a group of teenagers started throwing objects at the boats. The crews were told to turn and head directly to the landing stage and wait there. This incident was reported to the Police.
- A 2x rowed into and broke a fishing line. The fishermen were then extremely abusive and swore at the rowers. One of the fishermen used a catapult and tried to shoot stones at them. The rowers rowed away as quickly as possible but were very shaken. The incident was reported to the Police.
- Stones and gravel were thrown at boats by youths.

There were also antisocial behaviour incidents on the water: -

A lone young adult female rower was harassed and threatened on the water by three men in separate inflatable dinghies. She was chased on the water, they created waves to try and knock her in, harassed her with gender biased insults, trapped her with their boats, and videoed her. The situation escalated with greater threats and harassment, but the rower did not interact with the men and tried to ignore them, and they eventually left her alone.

The rower reported the incident to the Club Rowing Safety Adviser and to the Club Welfare Officer, who reassured her that measures would be taken by reporting the incident in full to British Rowing and the Police. Photographs were taken of the perpetrators. Emotional support was offered to the rower, and the Club will ensure that extra measures are put in place to help the rower to regain her confidence. A warning has been sent to all club members about keeping safe on the water and using the 3R process of "Don't REACT, REMOVE yourself from the situation and REPORT the incident".

In another incident the driver of a motorboat catcalled several female rowers, one of whom was a junior accompanied by an adult family member and made sexual comments towards them. He then tried to follow this crew but could not because another rower positioned their boat between him them and the motorboat. The driver repeatedly shouted an inexperienced scullers' name, after hearing a coach say it, and then did donuts so they could not get past.

The driver also drove at an adaptive supported 4x+ and steered hard to send a wave of wash into them. This flooded the coxing seat and intimidated the cox.

A coach took photographs and video of the boat and has a description of the driver. This incident has been reported to the Police and to the Navigation Authority

There is further advice in the [Safety-Alert-Coping-with-the-behaviour-of-others-June-2023.pdf](#).

Keep a good look out and do not rely on shouted warnings

A 4x- rounded a bend to find a paddleboarder on the wrong side of the river. There were no shouted warnings and there was a minor collision but no damage. Club members were reminded of the need to keep a good lookout as there are many paddleboarders. There was a suggestion that Paddle UK should provide better training to their members.

Many Paddleboarders are not members of Paddle UK and have not done any of the training that Paddle UK provides. They simply buy their paddleboard from a supermarket, find a stretch of water, inflate their board and launch. Paddleboards are not expensive so mostly owned by individuals. Rowing boats are expensive so mostly based at clubs. The two sports are fundamentally different in this respect.

In another incident, a 4x was travelling at speed but the steers person was not looking ahead. A rower in a 1x was ahead and shouted a warning three or four times but the steers person still did not look around. They looked around at the very last moment and took evasive action.

Take care to comply with safety rules, they are there for a reason

A rower ignored the bad weather advice from club captaincy team and other experienced rowers and continued a solo outdoor rowing session. Also, the rower did not follow club safety guidelines by not ringing the Dock master to ask for information on the shipping movements in the dock. The rower subsequently got into difficulty when they could not manage the windy conditions and needed help from the club members to get back to dry land. The rower involved has been reminded of the club safety rules and sent the safety rules document. The captaincy team will speak to the rower when they are next at the club.

Take care to respond to warnings immediately

Two 8+s collided in a processional bumps race when a klaxon was sounded to stop the race due to the presence of swans (who are protected) on the racing line. The leading crew stopped but the following crew did not stop in time and collided with the crew in front. The bow ball of the following crew luckily went down the side of the hull rather than up towards the cox and stroke. There was serious damage to the hull of the leading boat, and it began taking on water. The stern pair of the boat had to be taken onto a launch to reduce the weight in the stern so that the boat took on less water.



Take care to supervise crews that are being coached

A group of junior rowers was being coached by two coaches each in launches. The first part of the group went afloat and left with the first coach. Some boats in the second group were delayed and some rowers left the vicinity of the club before the other, together with the coach could depart. This small group rowed for most of the outing unsupervised.

Please advise coaches to take care to ensure that rowers do not become separated and that all members of the group, including other coaches in launches, remain in the vicinity of the club until all are ready to depart.

It is sobering to note that the incident in Limerick, where a 13-year-old rower suffered serious brain damage, started when two coaches in launches, and the crews that they were coaching, became separated.

Take care when spinning

A 4+ had just finished a training piece and was instructed to spin out of the buoyed course to row back up to the start. They began their spin and had turned 90 degrees, but they did not move away as instructed, repeatedly, but started to chat. The side of their boat was struck by a 4x- that had just crossed the finish line, this caused a five-centimetre hole in the 4+. The squad was subsequently reminded of the importance of being alert and following instructions.

In another incident a 4x was rowing in the warmup lane going up to the start and noticed a 2x ahead spinning in an area where this is not permitted. The crew of the 4x held up their boat but its bow penetrated the side of the 2x. The 2x sank when the boats were separated.

In a further incident a 2x spun but did not cross to the correct side of the river. They collided with a 4x+. The crew of the 2x called to alert the 4x+ but the 4x+ crew did not hear them.

There was another collision between a 4x and a 2x whilst the 4x was stationary having just turned in the river.

Please take extra care when spinning and move immediately to the correct position on the waterway.

Help from a passing kind canoeist.

A rower in a 1x reported that they were going quite fast (for them) but one scull was caught in weeds, then they capsized. They were kindly helped back into their boat by a passing canoeist.

In another incident a rower who capsized from a 1x was helped by a passing paddleboarder.

Take care around recreational boats

A rowing crew had to reduce speed to try to avoid a pedalo that had an erratic course. Please remember that pedalos, punts and other recreational craft can be very unpredictable.

Take care and think ahead

There was a near miss between an 1x and a 4x. The bow steers of the 4x had very poor eyesight. They usually wear glasses, and they did not have their contact lenses. Many people on the bank and on the water were shouting at the 4x but the crew did not respond.

Take care with contaminated river water

There continue to be reports of rowers becoming ill following exposure to river water. There were four such reports in April. Please take care to encourage rowers to avoid exposure and to maintain good hygiene practices if there is any chance that they have been exposed.

Take care to be aware in the wind

A stable 4x was placed on trestles but a strong gusting wind blew it off and it was damaged when it hit the ground. Please take care to assess the conditions. It is understood that the wind was blowing at over 40 mph, and the cost of the damage is “likely to be in region of £2,000”.



Take care and pay attention when in the vicinity of other boats

An 8+ was returning after a head race and was stationary as the boats ahead had also stopped to allow returning crews to cross. The boat behind them did not stop in time and the bow of the boat collided with the coxes arm and then mounted the stern of the 8+. There were minor scratches to the boat and bruising and abrasions to the arm of the cox.

Take care to check the boat before going afloat

The top nut and back stay of a 2x flew off when afloat. The boat had not been checked before going afloat.

In another incident, a rower in a 1x capsized whilst practising front end square blade drills. The heel restraints failed making it difficult for the rower to get free from the boat. Please check boats, especially heel restraints, before going afloat.

Call for help whenever help is needed

A 4x+, accompanied by a launch, capsized at high tide due to a wind gust and turbulent water. There was no place to put the crew ashore, so the boat was secured to the launch, and the coach called the Coastguard. The crew stayed with the boat. Four members of the crew were rescued by other launches and the cox returned to the club via a PLA launch and a Lifeboat. The Lifeboat also recovered the launch.

Please do not be reluctant to call for help when help is needed.

Take extra care around sailing dinghies

There was a collision between a 1x and a sailing dinghy when the sailing dinghy changed course by 180 degrees to cross a river. The crew of the dinghy lost sight of the 1x as their view was obstructed by their own sail. It is quite normal for dinghies to make large course changes particularly when tacking to windward in confined waterways. Please take extra care to keep a good lookout when rowing near sailing dinghies and avoid the areas that sailors are using if this is practicable.

Take care to look out for swimmers

There was a near miss between a 4- and a swimmer. The crew of the 4- was warned of the presence of the swimmer by other rowers and stopped in time. We are approaching that time of year when the presence of swimmers increases. Please take care to keep a good lookout.

Take care after capsizing

An experienced rower, who learned to scull 50 years ago capsized (apart from capsize drill) after colliding with an unpowered and adrift motorboat. The rower was looking over their left shoulder once every five strokes and had not seen the motorboat. There is now new advice in RowSafe to look over both shoulders. The rower took their feet out of their shoes as they capsized. The water was cold, so the rower climbed on top of their boat and straddled the upturned hull. The rower was assisted by other rowing boats in the vicinity. They got out of the water onto a 4x and were taken back to the club house in the safety launch.

Please coach your rowers to take this approach if they capsize and follow the advice in the Capsize training on RowHow here [Section: Capsize Training for Rowers | Capsize Drill | Home](#).

In another incident two rowers in 1xs collided and one capsized. The rower in the water remembered their training and climbed onto the other 1x and was rowed back to the landing stage.

Small Talk Saves Lives

Last month's report contained an item featuring a British Rowing Satellite coach who probably saved the life of a person who entered the water intending to take their own life. I have nominated this coach for a Royal Humane Society award.

It is not unusual for rowers to encounter people who are attempting to take their own lives and, unfortunately, it is not unknown for rowers to find dead bodies in the water, there is new guidance on what to do in these circumstances in section 9.2 of RowSafe. About 200 people in the UK take their own lives each year by drowning.

Rowers can help in several ways including by being aware of people near the water, or on bridges, who may be contemplating taking action. Advice on how to intervene is provided in the Safety Alert "Small Talk Saves Lives". This is available on the website here [Safety-Alert-Small-Talk-Saves-Lives.pdf](#) and a copy is included with this report. This guidance has been prepared with assistance of the Samaritans.

If you roll your leggings down to your ankles, then don't capsize

My colleague from Scotland wrote to say that when a 4+ capsized and the crew entered the water, one of them had great difficulty floating and could not swim. The rower had rolled their leggings (or tracksuit bottoms) down to their ankles and when they found themselves in the water, their ankles were effectively bound together. Please take care not to let clothing become a hazard.

New Safety Video

Fulham Reach Rowing Club has produced a new Rowing Safety Video. They describe this as “a vital new resource designed to support safer rowing for everyone in our local community, particularly new audiences who may not have connections to the river or the sport of rowing.”

The video can be found here [Safety At Fulham Reach Boat Club](#).



This video brings together key safety advice in a clear, practical format, covering essential topics such as the **safety position** for boat stability, correct use of **buoyancy aids**, and best practices for **hard stops, handling capsizes and emergency situations**. Whether a beginner, an experienced rower, or a coach, the video offers straightforward guidance that helps everyone feel more confident and prepared on the water.

Blisters

I was asked for advice on the treatment of blisters and replied explaining that there are articles on Blisters near the bottom of the athlete health page here [Athlete Health - British Rowing](#)

Take care of rowers suffering Panic Attacks

A rower became unable to paddle and unresponsive to cox, coach or crew mates efforts, they then started crying, became angry and shouted, "help me". Once on land this was resolved and normal behaviour resumed but the rower was unwilling to talk about it to the crew. This rower has a history of similar previous episodes. The club has suggested that the rower does not attend future water sessions until they have had counselling.

There is information about Panic Disorder on the NHS website here [Panic disorder - NHS](#). People who row with anyone who is prone to panic disorder should be made aware of what they should do.

Water and Air Temperatures

As the summer approaches, and the temperature rises, then please take extra care. The air temperature may be higher, but the water temperature lags behind, only reaching its highest in the autumn. If you fall in, then be prepared for the cold (breathe in before you hit the water). Please remember that the gasp reflex is triggered by the rate of skin cooling. Rowers with bare arms and legs should take particular care.

RowSafe 2025

The 2025 edition of RowSafe has been published and can be accessed from the RowSafe page here [RowSafe - British Rowing](#)

Updates from last year's edition are highlighted in yellow and include seven new sub-sections. Six of these are on Adaptive Rowing, developed with the Adaptive Rowing Group, and one is on Anaphylaxis. There are also over 100 other additions. The longer additions resulted from conversations with the Adaptive Rowing Group and many more updates were identified from last year's Monthly Reports.

A list of changes is also available via this link [British-Rowing-2025-RowSafe-Changes.pdf](#) on the RowSafe page. This document is also included with this report.

Please feel free to contact me at safety@britishrowing.org if you have any comments or questions.

Work with Paddle UK

Copies of incident reports that refer to canoeists and paddleboarders have been shared with a colleague at Paddle UK (formerly British Canoeing).

Passage through locks

There was an incident in which four touring 4x+s entered a river lock. All crews had received a safety briefing prior to departure on how to transit locks. The four boats were transiting the lock travelling upstream. The shore crew had closed the downstream lock gates and had opened the upstream sluice gates. The lead boat bow ball snagged under one of the cross members of the upstream lock gate. The bow of the boat was forced down as the water rose within the lock. The boat took on water. The shore crew immediately closed the upstream gates and opened the downstream sluices. The boat levelled, remained upright and the crew were able to bail the water out of the boat. The crew remained in the boat. It did not capsize.

The instructions for passing through locks are: -

GOING THROUGH LOCKS—STAY VIGILANT

This is the most dangerous part of any extended tour, and all rowers and coxes must be vigilant when in a lock to minimise risks.

- Remain vigilant whilst in the locks. It is not the time to relax and let go of the blades to fiddle with cameras, sunscreen or foot plates – all of that can be done once you are out of the lock
- Everyone must remain alert to possible dangers when boats are in the lock and ready to react quickly to avoid dangers
- Coxes should remind crews of how to behave as they go into the lock
- Crew should take their feet out of the straps when going into the lock
- When going downstream, check that the stern of the boat is well clear of the cill of the gate behind so that the rudder does not get caught
- Check that the bows of the boat are well clear of the gates and any obstructions on the sides of the lock
- Ensure that the blades do not get caught in ladders or other indentations on the wall of the lock as the water level changes
- Keep the blades flat on the water and under control
- Bear in mind that the force of the water entering or leaving the lock will move the boats forwards and backwards in the lock, as well as the level of the water changing, so you need to keep checking for hazards
- If crowded, rafting up with adjacent boats may be useful
- If ropes are used, ensure they run freely around bollards and are long enough for the fall of the lock
- If you notice a problem, shout to the lock-keeper or the bank party so they can take appropriate action

When you are in the lock EVERYBODY in the boat has a responsibility to continually check that the bow, riggers, blades and rudder are free of hazards as the water level changes. The cox cannot see everything. If you spot a problem, alert the cox and the bank crew quickly.

All crew members must follow instructions from the cox save that in an emergency the bank leader may take over from the cox in directing the boats as the bank crew will have a better view of what is happening.