



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

June 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents reported in June

Please avoid quoting profanities, rude words and swear words in incident reports. British Rowing has a filtering system to block emails that contain these words either in the main text or in attachments.

Take Care to Avoid Head on Collisions

A 4x- and a 2x were going in opposite directions during training. Both bow rowers were experienced at steering but failed to see each other in time resulting in riggers hitting and a blade being broken. The club reinforced the need to keep to the correct side of the river and keep a good lookout at all times.

In another incident, two 2xs left the boathouse together. The crews boated one after the other. They proceeded downriver. They had to pass between two lines of moored yachts. One crew was a few minutes ahead of the other. The water conditions were getting worse, so the first crew decided to stop when they cleared the lines of moored boats. The first crew decided to turn and return setting off back into the area between the lines of moored boats, even though the other crew were yet to have caught them up. The two crews collided head on breaking an oar in the first boat. The other crew turned back and returned to the club.

The club has identified the following two learning points: -

- 1) When two boats are both proceeding downstream at the same time then one should wait for the other to appear before turning and
- 2) When there is one damaged vessel on the water, and only one other boat able to offer support, then the boats should stay together.

In yet another incident, an 8+ was overtaking two 1xs but did not notice the second 1x that was further from the bank. The bowman of the 8+ heard something, took a look, and immediately called for the 8+ to hold it hard. The rest of the crew responded appropriately, reducing speed considerably but the 8+ hit the stern of the 1x. Coxes at the club have been instructed to look further ahead.

In a further incident a rower in a 1x moved out to avoid a tree and over steered. They hadn't seen, and had not been seen by, a 4x due to the bend in the river. Backstays on both boats were damaged.

In another incident a 1x was on the correct side of the river and two 4-s were racing in the opposite direction accompanied by a coach in a launch. One of the 4-s was on the wrong side of the river. The rower in the 1x shouted at them twice to stop. The 1x stopped and a 4- attempted to stop but did not slow enough and they collided. The coach in the launch had a megaphone but was not heard to warn their crews.

In yet another incident, two 2-s were travelling in opposite directions. One boat is reported to have crossed to the wrong side of the river. There was a head on collision resulting in the one rower being hit in the back and elbow causing them to let go of their oar and the boat to capsize. A rigger was ripped off the other boat and this boat will need extensive repairs.

Please encourage crews and their coaches to keep a good lookout.

Antisocial behaviour

Last month's report contained information about incidents of Antisocial Behaviour as it is that time of year when this becomes more common. This month there have been more incidents and of a more serious nature. Please take care.

The following incidents occurred this month: -

- Three large "working" boats, caused partial swamping of recreational rowers' boats. The motorboats were not travelling together so three separate excess wash events occurred within the one outing. This was reported to the Canal and Rivers Trust.
- A learn to row 8x+ was rowing and heard a large splash behind them due to something being thrown into the river. As they were rowing past a group of teenagers thought to be aged around 14, they threw another two items. One of these narrowly missed the crew and another hit the side of the boat. No more items were thrown but one of the teenagers pulled their trousers down to expose their backside. The crew moved into the middle of the river as it was a quiet time of day and kept a good look out.
- A group of men made lewd and suggestive comments to women rowers in a 4x+ and appeared to follow their boat from the bank. When the crew returned to the boathouse, two men of similar appearance approached the crew and asked if they could wash their hands. They were provided with a bucket of water, which they rejected. It was suspected that they wanted to be taken into the boathouse which the women would not do. The men then left.

The following day, one of the crew received a social media message from one of the men. His account indicated that he was "following" other female club members and "liking" their photographs. This has been reported to the Police.

A group of 13 to 14 years olds were socialising on the steps and jumping in the river. This has been common recently, but the older teenagers are polite and will move to allow boats on and off and do not impede members or abuse verbally. They also do put litter in a bin when asked respectfully. On this occasion, the younger children were impeding the return of the safety launch so that it couldn't land. They were aggressive in language and tone. The Club spoke to some of the older teens to explain that they need safe use of the boating steps. They were understanding and polite and spoke to the younger ones. The following day the same youths were obstructing the use of steps and river by swimming from them, hanging from the bridge and throwing stones into the river. They were asked to move away but they responded with verbal abuse instead. The Police attended and spoke to youths that hadn't left on their arrival. The Police are planning to visit at key times to help prevent antisocial behaviour and enable everybody to use outdoor space peacefully.

- There was another incident that was not reported using the Incident Reporting System but that was summarised on the BBC News website under the headline "*Rowers targeted with catapults and air rifles*". The item can be found here [Rowers in Cambridge targeted by catapults and air rifles - BBC News](#)

Please remember the 3Rs: -

Don't REACT
REMOVE yourself from the situation
REPORT to the Navigation Authority, Police etc.

Take care to check your boat before you go afloat.

A rower was in a 2- that had a top nut that was loose. They rowed very carefully back to the landing stage but had to hold the boat up, the gate slipped off the pin and the 2- capsized. Please encourage rowers to check their boats before they go afloat.

Take care with winches

A rower was hit in the face by a winch handle when they were helping to bring a RIB safety launch onto its trailer. The ratchet mechanism was defective and the winch handle span hitting the rower on the bridge of the nose. This caused a broken nose resulting in a nosebleed and a cut to the bridge of the nose. Please check you winches and maintain them in good condition.

Take care in your launch

An umpire fell from a launch that was taking on water. The water ingress was caused by the weight being heavily towards the stern of the launch while removing weed from the rudder by operating the engine in a forwards to backwards sequence. The launch is a very light boat and needs careful handling. It tends to be low in the stern.

The driver put the boat into full reverse; this caused the stern to drop and water to enter the launch. The stern dropped further, and the launch began to turn and tilt causing more water to enter the boat. This caused the Umpire to fall into the water.

In another incident a launch engine failed and could not be restarted. The fuel line had split where it connects to the motor. Please check your launches before you use them.

Take care around fallen trees

There was a collision between a 2x and a 4x+ when the 4x+ made a steering error and clashed blades with the 2x. There was no space for the the 2x to move out of the way because a fallen tree was blocking half the navigation channel. Please take extra care in areas where the width of the waterway is restricted.

In another incident a tree branch fell off, narrowly missing a person who was standing on the pontoon and a rower in a 1x who was landing at the pontoon. The branch weighed about 40kg, the snapped end is about 10cm diameter. Please take care under trees

Take care when carrying boats

A 1x was being retrieved after a capsize and the person carrying the boat was also holding a dog belonging to the rower that had just capsized. The dog lunged towards birds causing the person carrying the boat to drop it and the boat cracked in the middle.



Take care to keep a good lookout

A rower in a 1x was practising a start and was under the impression that they were steering a correct line so didn't need to look ahead. They then collided with a tree and this damaged the boat. The rower has resolved to look ahead every 3-5 strokes, be more aware of their surroundings and give themselves ample room when practising starts.

In another incident a 4x was in the correct place on the waterway when a canoe ahead moved into its path. Another canoeist shouted a warning and the 4x stopped and held up but collided with first canoeist, hitting them in the back with the shaft of a blade. The canoeist was shaken and sore but said that they were alright otherwise. The steersperson recognised the need to look round more frequently when canoeists are in the vicinity.

This incident was also reported by a canoeist who said that a group was paddling upstream, two abreast, close to the right bank of the river. The leader and one of the sit on top paddlers were at the back of the group. When the leader checked behind, he became aware that a 4- that was heading directly for the group at considerable speed. The leader shouted a loud and urgent warning to the rowers. The rowing boat did not appear to change course or reduce speed. The rowing boat collided with the sit on top kayak. As the boats came to rest the rowing boat was hard up against a bush on the right riverbank and the sit on top paddler was caught in a rigger. There was a short verbal exchange between the paddle sport group and rowing crew during which the rowers commented that they couldn't see the paddle sport group as they faced backwards and that there were lots of paddlers on the river.

In a further incident a coastal 4+ was racing alongside two other club crews. The cox was pre-occupied with racing the other crews. The cox is experienced and familiar with the river but the 4+ collided with the wreck buoy.

Please ensure that rowers take extra care to keep a good lookout. If they are not sure that it is safe to proceed then they should not do so.

When is it safe to row at speed?

An 8+ was completing a race piece downstream close to the bank and some slower boats were proceeding upstream on the opposite bank. A narrow boat navigating in the middle of the river travelling upstream moved over towards the bank (against the navigation rules) to give the crews rowing upstream more space. The 8+ rowing at race pace was not aware of the narrow boat. A coach warned the eight to hold up to avoid a collision. Both the narrow boat and eight took evasive action to avoid a collision. Both boats came close but there was no contact.

The Club has advised its rowers, coaches and coxes to consider whether it is appropriate to do race pieces given the present river traffic. The Club's coxes should scan the river further ahead when doing race pieces to assess any upcoming hazards. All coaches should consider carrying megaphones to warn crews. Following another incident the same club has resolved to stop doing pieces at race pace around a blind bend.

Take care to tie in the loose ends

While transporting a single scull on a car roof rack, the tie securing the bow of a 1x came loose during stop-and-start traffic. The loose end of the tie was long enough to reach the car's front wheel. As the vehicle moved at a low speed (~ 10 mph), the unsecured tie was pulled underneath the front tyre. This resulted in the tie tightening and pulling the scull downwards, causing the hull to snap and the boat to strike the roof of the vehicle. The impact left a visible indentation on the roof and caused significant structural damage to the boat.



Please take care to tidy up loose ends.

Take care crossing roads

An 8+ was being carried across a road to the river when a cyclist, who was looking at their phone, cycled towards the 8+. The cyclist noticed the boat but was too late to avoid a collision. The boat was not damaged, but the cyclist was somewhat bruised.

The club has reminded its members to warn road users if it looks as if they are likely to collide with a boat.

Coach rescues a non-rower in distress

A dog had fallen into the river and its owner jumped in to save it, but the dog jumped out again leaving owner stuck in river and unable to climb up the bank. A coach in a launch rescued the dog owner and safely delivered them to a nearby public house.

The contents of Safety Kits

There was a request for guidance on the contents of Launch Safety Kits and First Aid kits. The person making the request had found the advice on launch safety kits in section 7.4.1 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#).

The response was that one size does not fit all. Clubs are expected to use their risk assessment to define what they need based on the hazards where they row and the people who row there. There are clubs that row on canals, lakes, rivers, estuaries and the sea. The hazards are different, and the equipment needed to keep people safe varies from place to place. People vary too. The suggested contents for First Aid kits is outlined in section 8.3 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#).

Clubs are also encouraged to ensure that they have ready access to a Defibrillator.

Advice to new CRSAs

There was some correspondence with two new Club Rowing Safety Advisers (CRSAs) in which they explained that they always try to be at most sessions although this is not always possible.

The following guidance was based on the earlier discussion.

Please remember that safety is a team game. You do not need to be present for all outings if you can enthuse and train your colleagues to look after their rowers as you would do.

We no longer recommend foil blankets but prefer "Foil Emergency Ponchos". These are not expensive. They are made from the same material as foil blankets but wrap around the body more easily and more effectively. They are available from lots of suppliers including [here](#).



Section 3.4 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#), contains a Club Rowing Safety Adviser job description.

There are further online training materials on RowHow, here [All courses | Home](#)

If you ever have any questions about rowing safety, then please feel free to contact your Regional Rowing Safety Advisor or me.

Trailer towing using a minibus that contains passengers

I was asked whether or is legal to use a minibus containing passengers to tow a boat trailer. The response is that there are rules about the type of driving licence needed to drive a minibus (particularly a school minibus) and to tow a trailer. There is further information here [Driving school minibuses: advice for schools and local authorities - GOV.UK](#) and here [Requirements for towing trailers in Great Britain INF30](#).

Simply checking the driver's driving licence will reveal relevant information.

As far as I can tell there is no law against towing a trailer using a minibus that has passengers. However, there is a safety concern because in the event of an accident, the trailer may block the rear doors of the minibus and make it difficult for the passengers to escape.

Car topping legislation

A rower wrote to ask for information on the relevant legislation that covers carting a 2x/2- on the roof of their car and any guide to overhangs, etc. The reply was that this information can be found here <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/TowingGuidance.pdf>.

The level of care that clubs and competitions are expected to take.

In a recent High Court judgement, it was determined that volunteer-run cycling club did not owe any liability to a car driver who seriously injured a rider on one of its events. This information was provided by my colleague in British Cycling.

In [*Hetherington v Fell & Anor*](#) it was concluded that the club had met its duty of care to warn drivers that cyclists were doing a time trial, and the negligent driver was solely at fault.

The case is believed to be the first time that the [Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015](#) has been relied upon in a judgment in the High Court. The legislation requires the court to have regard to whether any party to a claim was acting for the benefit of society or its members.

There is further information here [High Court clears cycling club of liability in Part 20 proceedings brought by car driver | Law Gazette](#). In effect, this was an attempt by the driver of the car to pass some of the liability for the damage caused to the cyclist onto the organisers of the competition. The attempt failed.

This judgement ends by saying: -

This was a voluntary organisation carrying out tasks for free for the benefit of members of society and the standard of care placed upon them in law is not so high that it would discourage such beneficial voluntary activities.

Rowing clubs also act for the benefit of society and their members but should continue to do whatever they reasonably can to keep their members and others safe.

The need for coxes to wear life jackets during tours

I was asked by a German rowing club about the need for coxes to wear personal Floatation Devices on tours. The club is planning a tour on the Upper Thames.

The response was that we strongly recommend that coxes wear personal floatation devices (PFDs) at all times when afloat. Lifejackets are generally preferred to buoyancy aids.

However, this is an expectation and not a requirement. This is stated in section 5.1 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#) under the heading Coxes and Steers. There is no legal requirement.

There is further advice on Touring in Section 4.9 of RowSafe. This recommends that you share your plans with the Regional Rowing Safety Adviser (RRSA) for the region where the tour will be located as they will have local knowledge and may be able to help. The email was copied to the relevant RRSA.

Work with the CPGA

Copies of incident reports that refer to interactions between rowers boats and pilot gigs have been shared with a colleague at the Cornish Pilot Gig Association (CPGA).

Take Care with Quick Release Shoes

Last month I described an incident where a rower in a rowing boat capsized and their shoes detached from their stretcher, but the rower had some difficulty removing their feet from their shoes as the shoes remained attached to the boat via the heel restraints.

I have been told by several people that it is not unusual for this type of shoe to become detached from the stretcher when this is not desired.

It is clear that the Quick Release Systems are designed so the Shoe Plate Top (and therefore the shoes) should remain attached to the Base Plate (Boat) even during a capsize, and hence heel ties should be used.

I have exchanged emails with the two leading manufacturers of this type of quick release shoe.

BAT Logic informed me that *“The BAT Logic system has been strenuously tested and does not release from the Base Plate on the foot stretcher if the rower has clicked the plate in correctly.*

Unfortunately, rowers can often be in a hurry and have been known to not correctly attach the Quick Release System.

“Once engaged you should check the Shoe Plate Top’s tab is fully depressed by pushing down on it. This ensures a proper locked fitment. - If this is done correctly the Shoe Plate will not disengage.

Bont informed me that *“Bont Rowing and BAT Logic were previously involved in a collaboration under the name Project B, which concluded several years ago. Some ongoing customer confusion remains, which may be legacy products sold under that partnership. Since the conclusion of Project B, Bont Rowing has developed and launched its own BR QRS system, along with a new range of rowing shoes that have now been in the market over three years.*

They also wrote *“a quick release system does not remove the need for standard safety equipment such as heel ties and safety straps, and that all equipment should be thoroughly checked before each outing, even when using familiar or personally owned boats.”* This is good advice and appropriate for all rowing shoes. There is further information on how to check these features on the Bont website here [Safety | Bont Rowing](#). This is relevant to most types of shoe not just quick release ones.

If you use Quick Release Shoes, of any type, then please ensure that they are correctly fitted. Please check their attachment rigorously at the beginning of each outing where they are used.

Work with PaddleUK

Copies of incident reports that refer to canoeists and paddleboarders have been shared with a colleague at PaddleUK (formerly British Canoeing). I made a comment on one Incident Report inviting rowers to *“Please understand that you should never rely on shouted warnings. It is always the responsibility of the person steering the boat to keep a good lookout and ensure that the waterway ahead is clear. If they are not sure that it is safe to proceed then they should not do so.”*

Safety Alerts

This report is accompanied by two Safety Alerts, they are: -

- Respect your Boundaries, and
- Questions for new members

“Respect your Boundaries” was prepared following a discussion with our Safeguarding Manager. The activities that are described happened in rowing clubs; they are real. These are clearly examples of bad practice that should be avoided. There is a general lesson to be learned here; coaches, and others, should consider whether the actions they are contemplating are legal, fair, equitable and in the best interest of the rower.

“Questions for new members” is taken from the response to a request from a club and follows medical, ethical and industrial best practice. It is not fair to demand confidential information from anyone. It is better to be positive and simply open a discussion about how the club can help the new member to keep themselves, and others, safe.

Functional Neurological Disorder

Following discussions with the British Rowing Safeguarding team, a Club Welfare Officer wrote that their club has a junior member who would like to return to training following a diagnosis of Functional Neurological Disorder (FND). The rower was having what seemed like panic attacks or seizures after training sessions and had to be taken to hospital after a training camp. The rower and their mother decided to have a break from rowing until medical tests had been carried out and the rower had finished their GCSEs.

The rower would now like to return to training. The medical tests have been concluded and the rower's FND is being managed. They are not having regular episodes and have strategies set out to manage these if they do occur.

The coaches, we are happy to support a phased return to training, starting with land-based training, followed by a return to training afloat in September if no further episodes occur. The Club is also concerned about the safety of training afloat and asked for assistance.

The response was that I had never heard of Functional Neurological Disorder found these websites useful [FND Action - Home](#) and [Functional neurological disorder \(FND\) | NHS inform](#). The British Rowing advice on [Rowing and Epilepsy - British Rowing](#) may also be useful. This mentions life jackets, but I feel that lifejackets and buoyancy aids can introduce problems of overheating, and, in the case of lifejackets, it may require the wearer to have the ability to inflate them before they enter the water. It would also make your rower feel different to their colleagues and this may make them uncomfortable.

FND may be one of those disorders where every individual has a different experience and everyone learns to manage their own disorder in their own way. Work with your rower, and their parents, to find out how the club can best help and support them.

We try to make rowing a safe and inclusive sport but sometimes have to take care that the desire for one of these does not impact on the other.

In my view, the club's suggestion that your rower should make a phased return to land-based training with their friends is eminently sensible. You will then be able to learn more about the rower's ability to cope with rowing afloat.

I think that it is important to manage the transition to intense training in a controlled and progressive way. Simply reintroducing the rower to squad training will introduce some pressure, rowers are often very competitive, and they may want to show their squad mates how well they can perform. Consider starting with rate limited erg sessions for the whole squad, taking care not to make this rower feel that they are receiving special treatment, and build up to full rate intense training over time. Consider the level of intensity and the duration. This is not too difficult when indoor rowing as the monitor will provide the information needed.

The Club should then accumulate the information it needs to inform a decision on returning to rowing afloat. Consider the nature of any episode that may occur. Check with the rower's medical team and to engage their parents in the process. The plan to return to rowing afloat in September seems sound but that date should not be fixed now. Wait and decide on timing when the Club, the rower, and their parents are ready.

The suggestion that the rower returns to rowing in a 4x makes sense but please position the rower, at first, in the middle of the boat so that there are people around them who are well positioned to provide any support that may be needed. Please also ensure that these other rowers are aware of what could happen and are able and willing to provide support.