



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

September 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents reported in September

Take care to avoid the middle of waterways

The following incidents resulted from rowers straying into the centre of waterways: -

- A 4x collided, mid river, with a 1x where the river is quite narrow and many boats are moored.
- A rower in a 1x was catching up two other boats and moved to the middle of the river without checking it was safe to do so and collided with another 1x travelling in the opposite direction.
- A rower in a 1x moved into the middle of the river to overtake a cruiser and then heard a call from a 4- coming the other way to hold it up. Both boats held it up resulting in a very low speed collision. The crews subsequently discussed the incident and concluded that it would have helped if the rower in the 1x had been wearing hi-vis and everyone had kept a better lookout. The 4- shouldn't have been so central in the river.
- A 2x failed to keep tucked in at a bend and there was a clash of blades with a 1x which was travelling upstream.
- A 4x was paddling down river was on the wrong side of the middle of river and collided with a 2x coming upriver.
- A 1x going downstream collided under the new pedestrian bridge with a 4x coming upstream. Both crews were in the middle of the river.
- There was a collision between a 1x and a 2x coming travelling in the opposite direction and going wide round a corner.
- A 2x, heading upstream on correct side of river, collided with another 2x proceeding downstream that had drifted wide after passing under a bridge. One crew held up their boat, but the other crew appeared unaware how to stop their boat (or panicked).
- Two 1xs were travelling in opposite directions close to centre of the river. One rower noticed the other boat when it was two or three boat lengths away and called a warning. Both rowers held up but their riggers became entangled and both boats capsized. The rowers re-entered their boats and resolved to keep a better lookout on bends.
- A 4- was proceeding upstream on right hand side, but close to centre of river. An oncoming 1x was overtaking two other 1xs and was in the middle of the river. The 4- noticed late and held hard. Both boats slowed but did not stop and they collided.
- A 2x was proceeding downstream race pace near the centre of the river and collided with a stationary 4x also near the centre of the river.
- A 4x was rowing upstream near the middle of the river (it was quite narrow). A 4- came round the corner and the crews collided.
- A 4x proceeding, at a medium to high pace and rounded the bend in the middle of the river. The steers failed to look over their right shoulder and did not see an approaching 1x. The 1x was on the correct side of the river. There was a clash of blades.
- A 2x was rowing upstream when it got a bit too close to the middle. It was in the process of getting back into the right lane when, at a blind corner, a 1x came the other way. There was a collision.



- A 4x came round a blind corner in the middle of the river and clashed blades with 8+ on the correct side of the river.
- A 1x was heading downstream, cut the corner on the wrong side of the river and collided with a 1x that was heading upstream in the correct position.

There were so many incidents where collisions occurred when rowers crossed the centre of the river that extra care is needed. Please encourage your rowers to take extra care to not to stray into the centre of waterways and keep a good lookout wherever they are.

Is it safe to row in the dark?

There was a head on collision between two 2xs (one without lights) in darkness. In another incident a 4x rowed into a large island in darkness.

Please consider whether it is safe for rowers at your club, particularly in coxless boats, to row in the dark. Please include this in your risk assessment.

Take extra care upstream of obstructions

A rower in a 1x capsized and floated with the stream towards Dove Pier. He was plucked out the water at the first boat on the dock. It was just a close call. The wind and tide pushed the rower to the outside of the bend towards the pier.

Please be aware of the extreme hazard of being swept into a large obstruction like Dove Pier. It may help to review the report on the "[Dove Pier Incident](#)" in 2016.

Take extra care when rowing side by side

Just because crews are involved in informal races does not absolve them of the requirement to comply with navigation rules. The following incidents resulted from crews rowing side by side.

- There was a blade clash with a 1x and a 2x speeding round a blind bend far out from the bank as part of a large flotilla of small boats that seemed to be racing each other.
- A rower in a 1x had to tuck right into to the side of the river to avoid a collision when they encountered two 8+s rowing side by side going in the opposite direction.

Take care when tidying up outside

A volunteer bent down to pick up something outside, near a box of supplies. They received a needlestick injury from a discarded Insulin Pen Needle. The volunteer went immediately to A&E where they were treated, and blood tests taken. They are now awaiting test results. The club will buy a small sharps bin that can be used by all the clubs sharing the facility and members will be informed.

Please consider whether a similar approach would be appropriate at your club.

Please take the sharps box to the sharp to be removed before handling it so as to reduce the distance it has to be carried.

There is further advice here [Avoiding needlestick or sharps injuries - HSE](#)

Anti-social behaviour

A 4- was out on the river and heading up stream, when a pleasure cruiser with at least six people who appeared to have been drinking passed them driving at speed. The same pleasure cruiser was later seen travelling at speed upstream straight towards a 2x. Their manner of driving was reckless, dangerous and appeared to be taunting the crew of the 2x. The pleasure cruiser then executed a 180 degree turn when close to the 2x causing a significant wash.

In another incident a person in an old cabin cruiser moored under the bridge threw a hammer at a coach in a launch and just missed. The person also made violent threats. The police reported that the person is a well-known drug addict, recently released from prison. The person was very cross as their generator and personal items had been stolen. It's on record. The Police asked for further incidents to be reported immediately and advised that confrontation should be avoided.

In a further incident a rower in a 1x was going with the stream when a group of about five leisure craft approached at speed causing significant wash. The harbour master passed shortly after, and the rower flagged them down and explained what happened.

Please take care not to engage with people who threaten or endanger rowers and take extra care to protect juniors: -

Don't REACT

REMOVE yourself from the situation

REPORT to the Navigation Authority, Police etc.

Take care on muddy slipways

After completing an outing in a 2x the crew got out of their boat onto a muddy slipway. One rower slipped and landed on their hip which unfortunately broke. This resulted in three hours in surgery, five days in hospital, and a minimum of 12 weeks recovery.

Rowers rescue a sheep

The crew of the 2x heard a sheep in distress in the water, beside the bank.

A member of the 2x crew entered the water and rescued the sheep by assisting it onto the riverbank. A passer-by held the 2x while the rower got back into the boat and safely rowed away.

Check your boats and trailers for protruding bolts

A rower suffered a deep scratch to the back of their calf when it was scratched by a long protruding bolt on the trailer when pulling a Safety Launch out of the river. The long bolt was subsequently replaced by a shorter bolt and other safety launch trailers were checked.

Please ensure that your trailers (and boats) are checked.

Take care when rowing through locks

An 8+ drifted into the lock gate and bow ball got wedged into the side of the gate as the lock was filling with water. The water level continued to rise and caused the hull of the 8+ to crack. The damage was assessed and a temporary repair made then the boat was rowed back to boathouse with the heavier rowers in the stern four seats and the lighter rowers in the bows.

Please keep a good lookout and take extra care in locks.

Take care when opening the gate

The crew of a 2x capsized at the landing stage because they undid their gates before exiting the boat. Please advise you rowers on the correct procedure.

Take Care to check heel restraints properly before going afloat

It was a rower's first time in a 1x. The rower lost control of a blade and capsized. One of the rower's feet was stuck in the shoe. The heel restraints had been checked but one was too loose. The shoe's quick release mechanism was partly wrapped under the shoe and therefore was not accessible. After a short period of time, the foot slipped out of the shoe.

Please encourage your coaches to ensure that they educate all rowers on the importance of heel restraints or quick release mechanisms.

Take care to balance your launch

A coaching launch was transporting two rowers, and towing their 2x, due to ill health of one of the rowers. As the launch approached the landing stages the rowers were trying to adjust the position of the 2x to allow it be pushed into the dock. This resulted in both rowers being on one side of the launch. It is suspected that there is a hull leak on this side off the launch. The launch capsized and the coach and two rowers entered the water. All were rescued.

Please take care with weight distribution and please do not to use launches with suspected defects.

Take care to ensure that your Coaches are Competent

There was an incident in which a rower in a 1x capsized about 400m from the rowing club. The coach asked the rower to swim back to the club with the boat. A throw line was used to help tow the rower.

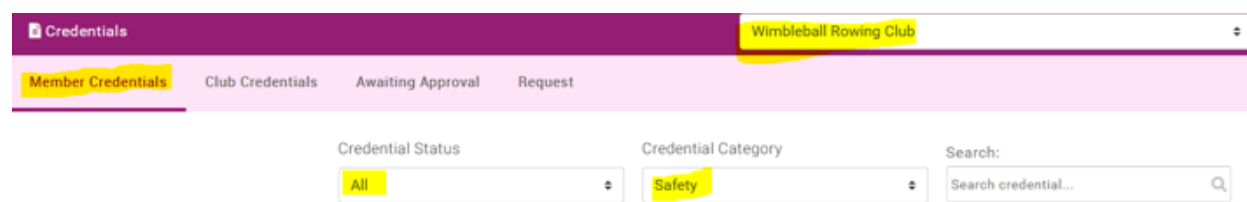
The coach appears not to be aware of the protocol that is the core of the British Rowing Capsize and Recovery training i.e., to: -

- Get free from the boat,
- Get out of the water, and
- Get off the water.

The coach has been asked to complete the [Course: Capsize Drill | Home](#) and [Course: Cold Water & Hypothermia | Home](#) modules in RowHow.

The Club Rowing Safety Adviser (CRSA) felt that they could not monitor which of their coaches has completed online learning modules and recommended that British Rowing provide a facility for them to monitor this. The CRSA appears not to be aware that British Rowing has already provided this facility in Club Hub. All that the club needs to do is instruct its coaches to upload the certificates that they can download on completing each module into the Credentials section of Club Hub, all British Rowing members can do this.

The club's Club Hub Administrator will then be able to check by logging into Club Hub here [Login - Justo](#), selecting "Credentials" from the menu, selecting the club and applying the correct filter as shown in the example below:



This will show which modules that each member has completed.

Failed links in RowSafe

Someone wrote to say that they had found two links in [RowSafe](#) that did not work. We update RowSafe each year and as part of that process we check all the links to make sure they are working properly. We will update the ones that do not work as part of the 2026 update early next year.

The following two alternative links were found: -

- Day Shapes and Signature Lights - [RMDL M4 Day Shapes and Sig Lights](#)
- Indoor Rowing Technique - [Improve Your Rowing Technique](#)

If you find any links in RowSafe or in Safety Alerts that do not work correctly then please let me know at safety@britishrowing.org.

Launch Driver Competence on tidal waters

I was asked whether the advice provided by a Club Rowing Safety Adviser that without an RYA L2 conducted on tidal waters a coach would not be covered to drive a launch on a river where the tide only comes over the weir for a few days each month. The response was that there is no longer a Coastal Endorsement for RYA Level 2 Powerboat. There used to be, but this ceased several years ago.

We must be careful not to confuse Qualification with Competence. We need launch drivers to be Competent. Competence can be defined as able to perform the specified task to the required standard. Some people who are qualified to perform a task are not competent and some who are competent are not qualified. Competence is task specific, and, in this case, it is also location specific.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines competence 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."* See here [What is competence? - HSE](#). Please note that this does not mention qualification and that training can take many forms.

Some Navigation Authorities require Launch drivers to hold RYA Level 2 Powerboat, but British Rowing does not. We merely ask that clubs ensure that the people who drive launches are competent to do so in the conditions that exist at their venue.

How to Overtake and how to be Overtaken

I was asked whether we had guidance as the club has some rowers in 1xs who overtake between the slower boat and the bank as there was no definitive advice on this in [RowSafe](#).

The response was that I could not find this in RowSafe either or in the Classic Coxing Workshop on RowHow here [Course: Classic Rowing Coxing Workshop | Home](#).

However, it is covered in detail in the COLREGs. ([MSN 1781 \(M+F\)](#)). Specifically in Rule 9 Narrow Channels. This an abstract from Rule 9: -

Rule 9

Narrow channels

- (a) A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fairway shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable.

In the case of rowers on most rivers and canals this means that rowers should keep close to the bank and move towards the centre of the waterway to overtake. There are some waterways (such as the Tideway) where specific rules apply but even on the Tideway the rule when rowing with the tide, is to keep to the starboard side of the fairway.

This will be included in the 2026 update to RowSafe.

Take care with your wash

There have been complaints of excessive wash from coaching launches on the Tideway. It helps if launch drivers moderate their speed so that they do not produce excessive wash particularly when they are close to rowers in small boats. The speed limit for launches that are not directly coaching a crew is 8 knots. If a coach becomes separated from their crew, then they are not allowed to exceed 8 knots when attempting to catch up. (8 knots = 9 mph).

Coaches should tell their crews that if they become separated from you then they should stop and wait because **you are not allowed to go fast to catch up with them.**

This, and other Coach Responsibilities are explained on page 44 of the [Tideway_Code.pdf](#), as shown below.

→ Coaching Launches

Launch positioning

A coach's first priority is the safe navigation of their launch and not the crew being coached. If alone, a coach must maintain full control and keep a proper lookout at all times (p.52).

- 1** Coaches should always behave with consideration for other craft especially with levels of wash. For further information on Launch Etiquette, please see thames-rrc.co.uk
- 2** Launches should not operate in the **Inshore Zone** unless directly coaching a crew. For crews in the **Inshore Zone** coaches must either:
 - 3** Be in-line astern with their crew so as to not obstruct the channel for other users by being positioned abreast of their crew, otherwise...
 - 4** Be on the opposite side of the river to their crew
 - 5** Coaches should generally position their launch to the 'outside' of their crew to help encourage the rowing boat to stay on the correct line
 - 6** Avoid positioning the launch to the 'inside' of the crew

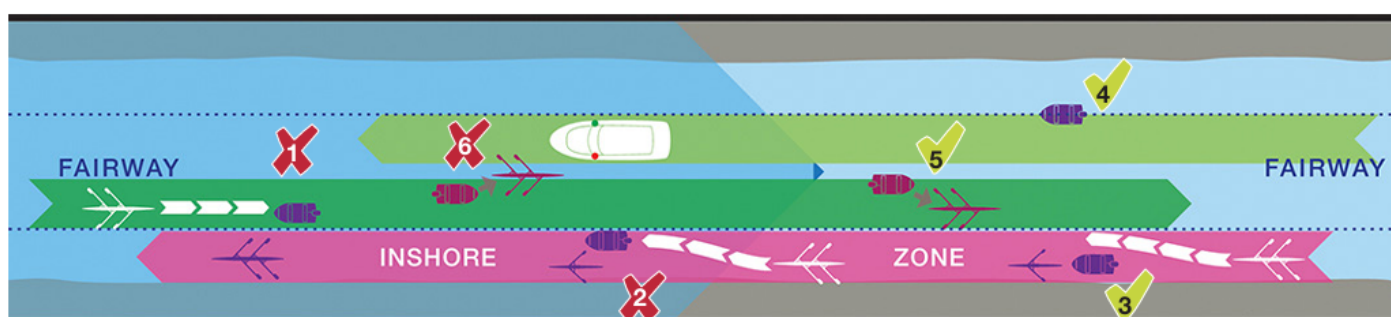
Speed limits

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 **8knots** 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 8knots when attempting to catch-up with a crew.

Similarly coaches must proceed with extreme caution and within the speed limit behind aits.



Do Rowers have to be able to Swim?

I was asked for some clarity on those individuals (adults or juniors) that wish to Learn to Row but are unable to swim. The club asks members to confirm that they can "self-rescue". If this term is used, then it should be clearly defined. There was further information on this topic in the August Monthly Report

I feel that the concept of self-rescue is overly restrictive. It is perfectly possible for one rower to rescue another, indeed this is included in the Capsize and Recovery training here [Course: Capsize Drill | Home](#). The alternative to the ability to self-rescue may be to row with others who can provide assistance if needed. In other words, to operate a buddy system.

The decision of British Rowing not to recommend that all rowers should be able to swim was not taken lightly. There are two reasons why the ability to swim was not universally required. The first is that it is safer to float than it is to swim (see [RNLI: Float to Live](#) and [The Science Behind Float To Live](#)). The second is that many people cannot swim and we do not want to introduce an unnecessary barrier to people rowing.

The decision on the appropriateness of a club requiring members to be able to swim should be based on the club's assessment of risks where it operates. For example, if the stream is so strong that a person floating is likely to be swept into danger (such as over a weir) then it may be reasonable to require them to be able to swim but only if this would be their only means of getting to safety. If they row in a group and can be rescued by a colleague, then a requirement to be able to swim could be unreasonable.

The challenge we all face is to find safe ways that people can do things rather than tell them that they cannot. If there is someone that a club is particularly worried about then consider alternatives rather than keeping them on land. For example, it may be safe for them to row in a crew, or in a boat with stabilizing floats, or wearing a personal floatation device.

As far as what club rules should be is a matter for the club, but the rules should be reasonable and not overly restrictive. The club should base its safety rules on its risk assessment.

There was further information on this topic in the [HRSA-Monthly-Report-August-2025.pdf](#)

Is it OK to swim with the boat?

There have been several incidents where, following a capsize, rowers have swum their boat to the bank to get out of the water. At this time of year, when the water is relatively warm, this may not be dangerous, but it is generally not good practice. It is better to climb on top of the boat and straddle and paddle it to safety. This is explained in the online [Course: Capsize Drill | Home](#) on [RowHow](#), where it also advises that swimming with the boat is only appropriate if the rower is "close to the bank and in easy conditions"

The extent of Civil Liability

I was asked about the extent of Civil Liability. The response started by saying that I am an Engineer and not a Lawyer but deal with liability issues from time to time. The key test is what is reasonable, or what a reasonable person would think to be reasonable.

I did a search and found the following US definition of “reasonable care” in [Legal Dictionary | Law.com](#): -

n. the degree of caution and concern for the safety of himself/herself and others an ordinarily prudent and rational person would use in the circumstances. This is a subjective test of determining if a person is negligent, meaning he/she did not exercise reasonable care.

more complete definition in English Law can be taken from the case of Donoghue v Stevenson in 1932, [Duty of Care Lecture | LawTeacher.net](#) where the following appears: -

The case itself involved a relatively simple (and now famous) set of facts. The plaintiff (Mrs Donoghue) visited a café in August of 1928 with a friend. The friend purchased an opaque bottle of ginger beer for Mrs Donoghue and decanted most of it into a glass tumbler for her to drink. After Mrs Donoghue had consumed the glass of ginger beer, her friend poured the remainder of the bottle into the glass, which to both Mrs Donoghue and her friend's surprise, contained a partially decomposed snail. As a consequence, the plaintiff suffered from 'shock and illness' and subsequently brought a case against the manufacturer of the ginger beer (Stevenson) for £500, asserting that it had failed in its duty to prevent foreign objects from making their way into its products. Following Winterbottom, the case was rejected in both of the lower courts, before being appealed to the House of Lords where it was successful, and Donoghue was awarded damages.

Key to the decision is the reasoning of Lord Atkin who held that a general duty of care could be said to exist between two parties under the 'neighbour principle', described here: -

"You must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour. Who, then, in law, is my neighbour? The answer seems to be- persons who are so closely and directly affected by my act that I ought reasonably to have them in contemplation as being so affected when I am directing my mind to the acts or omissions which are called into question."

It is also worth contemplating Section 1 of the [Compensation Act 2006](#), that deals with not preventing a desirable activity, this states: -

A court considering a claim in negligence or breach of statutory duty may, in determining whether the defendant should have taken particular steps to meet a standard of care (whether by taking precautions against a risk or otherwise), have regard to whether a requirement to take those steps might—

- a) prevent a desirable activity from being undertaken at all, to a particular extent or in a particular way, or*
- b) discourage persons from undertaking functions in connection with a desirable activity.*

In other words, providing the club sets reasonable rules and enforces them sensibly then it is unlikely to be subject to a successful claim for damages. As far as what those rules should be is a matter for the club, but the rules should be reasonable, not overly restrictive and based on the club's risk assessment.