



BRITISH ROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

January 2026

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incident Reports for January

Take care on bends and corners

A rower was at bow in a 4x, on the correct side of the waterway and looking ahead frequently. As they rounded a corner, they collided with a 1x that was not on the correct side of the waterway. The rower in the 1x stated that they were in the "middle of the river" as they were overtaking another boat. Neither crew could see properly around the corner.

In another incident, a rower in a 1x was heading upstream on the wrong side of the river on a bend. A 4x heading downstream was on correct side of river. The rower in the 1x alerted the 4x and the boats were able to pass without collision. The rower in the 1x had drifted out of their lane due to focussing on a training piece and the changing wind and water conditions on the bend.

Please take care when rowing round bends or corners, to keep a good lookout and keep to the correct position on the waterway.

Take care to consult with others when organising races

A 4- taking part in a mini head race was in the centre of the river and stopped as it caught up with a canoeist heading in the same direction but at a slower speed. Both boats came to a standstill no injuries or damage. An 8+, ahead of the 4- had had an altercation with the same group of canoeists under the suspension bridge in very similar circumstances.

The rowing club involved had notified the other rowing clubs of this event on this stretch but had not notified the local kayak club. Please take care to notify all other groups of waterway users when organising a club or other event.

Please take extra care in cold weather

After completing a competitive training session, a J15 rower in a 4x became breathless. The boat was able to row back to the clubhouse, followed by the coach in a launch. The air temperature was 1°C. The rower was pale and cold, and was wrapped in a blanket at the clubhouse. After about 45min they regained their colour and were taken home. The rower's doctor advised that this was an asthma attack and that the rower should carry an inhaler. Please be aware that cold weather is a common asthma trigger and take care with people who may be susceptible.

Take care at frontstops

A 4+ did a stationary drill, tapping at frontstops. The boat dropped to bow side, stroke side removed their hands from the blades and the boat tipped to 45 degrees. They managed to get the boat level again, but water was in the boat and at the level of the saxboard. The crew rowed to the edge of the river and got out as their legs were wet. As they got out of the boat onto a barge the boat capsized. The crew was recovered.

Boats tend to be unstable when the crew is at frontstops and are difficult to control when the blades are square. Please avoid holding crews in this unstable position. Some or all of the crew keeping blades feathered can help. Consider doing front end slaps rather than roll ups.

Take care not to slip and fall

A rower stepped onto the newly laid area of patio while walking to the boatshed, and just slid on the ice, falling onto their right knee, hip, elbow and shoulder, resulting in bruising and dented pride! It is reported that the new patio slabs had become very slippery while the surrounding older slabs were fine.

In another incident a rower slipped on ice falling on their wrist and elbow. This resulted in soft tissue damage resulting in no rowing for two weeks.

Take care to maintain your facilities

A wooden landing stage had an unknown loose plank that seemed to have moved out of place. When stepping onto the stages carrying a boat, a rower's leg went straight through the gap, leaving the leg wedged. The rower had a large bruise on their calf from falling through the stages.

Encourage rowers to pay attention when boating

The crew of a 4x was getting into the boat. Bow three were in with blades in. Stroke got in and bent over to put in blade. The rest of the crew were not anticipating this and as the boat heeled over, they were caught off guard and bent over which put the boat on its side. They remained like this for several seconds until they slowly started dropping out of the boat or letting go and climbing out at which point the boat fully capsized. The coach was in a launch and able to assist immediately. The crew climbed back in the boat (it was shallow enough to stand). There was some rigger damage, but no rowers were injured.

In another incident, after landing their 4+, stroke siders got out of the boat, bow siders took their blades out before stroke side rowers took hold of the boat, so the boat tipped over and bow and 3 seat went in the water for approximately 45 seconds.

Please encourage rowers to take care at all times.

Take care in fast flowing water

A club had training 8's on the water, with coaches present due to fast stream conditions. The 8's had reached the far point of their paddle and needed to turn around to head back to the boat house.

1st boat turned in advance of the 'cut' and sat talking with a coach.

2nd boat drifted past the 1st boat (therefore putting it into a position which meant they started to turn later than the 1st crew did).

2nd boat started to turn and, in doing so, caught a branch from the island on a blade which in turn held the boat towards the island.

This stopped the boat spinning and meant that it became stuck and being pushed against the branch and the island by the stream. Two coaches were present in launches; both coaches came to the aid of the crew in getting away from the island. The boat was damaged where it was pressed against the branch. Please take extra care when rowing in strong streams.

Take care as the tide turns

There was a collision between a 1x and an 8 at around low tide on the Tideway. There was some uncertainty about whether or not the tide had turned. The guidance on "Avoiding Collisions: the turn of the tide" on page 75 of the Tideway Code includes: -

- Navigate on the starboard side of the Fairway until you can be sure of the tide direction
- Observe how other crews are navigating and communicate with them about the state of the tide – it may be different where you are now to where they have just come from
- Only make changes to your navigation pattern once you are completely sure the tide has turned
- Avoid racing or doing pieces when you are unsure of the tide direction
- **KEEP A GOOD LOOKOUT**

Please take extra care at the turn of the tide.

Keep well clear of weirs

A 2x turned well upstream of a bridge above a weir and headed towards the club pontoon. The 2x capsized and the crew swam the boat to the landing stage assisted by a passing boat. The incident emphasised the need to turn well upstream of the bridge when the stream is strong to avoid the dangers of the weir.

Please remember to keep well clear of weirs especially when the stream is strong.

Do not forget about safety

Several boats went afloat together in darkness; they were in a group for safety reasons, and all were fitted with navigation lights. The 4x returned to the club to check the boat and one single remained afloat and later found itself to be on a collision course with the 4x and they collided with minimal damage.

Please make it clear to rowers that if they do something for safety reasons then these reasons should be respected. If they go out as a group, then they should stay in that group.

Take care with your wash

There were several incidents where rowers were endangered or inconvenienced by wash from launches. In one incident two 8s were racing side by side at top speed with two launches following closely at same speed. Neither driver appeared to be looking for other river users. One launch driver belatedly noticed the group of scullers and throttled back, the other didn't alter speed at all. All the singles were thrown about badly in the wash but stayed upright. The waves broke over riggers and saxboards - all scullers were soaked and each boat took on water and needed to be bailed.

Please consider others when driving launches.

Motorboat drivers and the law

A speedboat driver who crashed their boat into a 15-year-old kayaker was sentenced to 12 months in jail, suspended for two years, in the first prosecution by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) under new watercraft safety legislation. There is more information here [Speedboat driver who hit teen kayaker first to be sentenced under new safety law - GOV.UK](#).

The driver had previously pleaded guilty to the following other offences: -

- failing without reasonable excuse to prevent the loss or destruction of another watercraft and/or serious injury to another person, contrary to Section 6 of the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023.
- failing without reasonable excuse to comply with the [COLREGS](#), namely failing to adhere to Rule 5 (look out), Rule 6 (safe speed) and Rule 7 (risk of collision), contrary to Section 6 of The Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996.

This is the first prosecution under the [Merchant Shipping \(Watercraft\) Order 2023](#), introduced to empower prosecution of anyone who puts others at risk by using powered watercraft of any size, including launches, small motorboats and jet skis, in a dangerous manner.

The “order” extends the scope of the [Merchant Shipping Act 1995](#) to include any type of craft of any size, so long as it is capable of moving under its own mechanical power and can be used to carry one or more persons. There is further information in the Maritime Guidance Note [MGN 684 \(M\) Safety of powered watercraft - GOV.UK](#).

The Order applies on all UK waters (including inland rivers, canals, lakes, etc.). It will help to discourage others from putting rowers at risk, but it will also apply to the drivers of coaching launches. It becomes even more imperative that we operate our launches in a safe manner.

Videoing when Launch Driving

Someone wrote to comment that there is no explicit reference to videoing whilst launch driving in [RowSafe](#). The response was that this appears in Section 5.2 on Launch Driving:-

Coaches

Coaches are expected to:

- *Keep a good lookout at all times when afloat and warn other water users of any hazards or developing hazardous situations.*
- *Remember that if you are driving the launch then your primary responsibility should be the navigation of your own vessel, and not the coaching or accompanying rowing vessels. If your role requires you to be primarily focussed upon coaching, then another helmsman should be sought who can focus upon the navigation of the launch.*

In my view it is not safe to video when driving.

Coaching Launch best suited to rescue

A club wrote to say that they are looking for a new coaching launch that can also be used for rescue. They were thinking of a large, drop fronted, plastic launch which they feel would be better for rescue than the catamarans that they currently have.

I replied to say that the disadvantages of the type of boat that they describe are that they can: -

- create excessive wash when driven at speed
- have a high freeboard so it is difficult to lift anything from the water over the side of the boat
- if the front is dropped and people move to the front of the boat then it is possible for significant quantities of water to enter the boat, the free surface effect can then make the boat unstable

It was recommended that the club consider an inflatable or RIB as these can move quickly when needed, have soft sides and low freeboard.

It also depends on who is to be rescued. If the club needs a rescue boat to recover adaptive rowers, then I will consult colleagues with appropriate expertise.

Boat Licensing on Canal and River Trust waters

The Canal and River Trust has commissioned the following report - [The Future of Licensing: Report of the Commission on Boat Licensing \(October 2025\)](#). This has considered the issue of Boat Licensing and has drawn conclusions on: -

- **Boat Movement** - the Trust needs to create a clearer and simpler boat movement obligation.
- **Enforcement Powers** - the Trust at present operates with one hand tied behind its back.
- **The Trust's relationship with boaters** - the Trust's relationship with many boaters is often characterised by distrust and suspicion.
- **Limited capacity for moorings** - a consensus should be reached on the meaning of congestion and then the Trust should explore the possibilities of price differentiation and rationing.

This is a long and detailed report. If your club operated on C&RT waters, then please consider downloading a copy and reading the report.

Safety Provisions for a deaf blind rower

There was a request for advice on keeping a deaf blind rower safe. The response was that all rowers with disabilities should be treated as individuals and the first step is to work with the rower to gain a clear understanding of their needs. There is a little guidance and some links in section 3.9 of [RowSafe](#) on Adaptive Rowers at Clubs. The request was referred to the Adaptive Rowing Group at adaptiverowing@britishrowing.org .

Rules for Drones and their users

I was asked for information on the rules governing the use of drones.

The UK introduced major new drone rules on January 1, 2026, focusing on [UK-specific class markings](#) (UK0-UK6) for new drones, mandatory [Remote ID](#) broadcasting for identification, updated registration/Flyer ID rules for drones over 100g, and new [night flying requirements](#), including green flashing lights, aligning with updated CAA guidance to integrate drones safely into UK airspace.

There are also rules on: -

- **Pilot Registration & IDs:** Flyers of drones over 100g need a Flyer ID.
- **Operator ID:** This is mandatory for people who are responsible for a drone that:
 - Weighs 100g or more and has a camera.
 - Weighs 250g or more, regardless of whether it has a camera.
 - Children under 13 cannot get an Operator ID; a parent or guardian must register for them.

There is further information here

- [Registering to fly drones and model aircraft | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)
- [The Drone and Model Aircraft Code | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)
- [Background: Drones and model aircraft in the law | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)
- [Getting a Flyer ID before you fly \(points 27 to 29\) | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)
- [Ready to take the theory test? | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

Do Rowers who cannot swim need Lifejackets

There was an enquiry about the need for a rower who cannot swim to wear a lifejacket at competitions. The response was that we no longer advise that rowers must be able to swim; being confident in the water and being able to float can be sufficient. This advice is in section 3.6 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#), 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.*

If the rower can float, then they should be able to hold onto their boat and use it as their liferaft. There are some locations (e.g. upstream of a weir) where risk assessment will indicate that the ability to swim is necessary. Please consult the club's risk assessment and that of any competition that the rower may enter.

Threats that can destroy a Club

I was asked about Existential Threats to a Club and replied listing the following: -

- a major fire or structural collapse of the building
- a permanent increase in river levels (or flow rate) that makes rowing difficult
- a major child abuse scandal
- a series of serious safety incidents
- there could be problems if there were plans for development on the land that the club occupies
- if the club management is to be dominated by a few aged stalwarts and they all withdrew then there could be a problem unless the club has a succession plan
- a major embezzlement scandal or theft or high-risk speculative investment
- serious damage to the club's reputation (all rowing clubs rely on their reputations)
- long term loss of coaching capacity, without coaches the club may not be able to encourage new members to join

Please remember that few rowing clubs fail, most clubs continue for years and years.

The person making the initial request wrote to say that they worry about a major injury and being found negligent. The response was that the key concept is what is "reasonable". This has been defined as what a reasonable person would think to be reasonable.

The club can be held responsible for what it does and what it knowingly permits someone else to do. I expect that "knowingly" can be expanded to what is known and what it would be reasonable to expect to be known. Constructive ignorance is not a defence.

In other words, the club should have a risk assessment and use it to define its safety rules, procedures, etc. The club should then do what is reasonable to inform its members and check that they comply with these rules, procedures etc. and act accordingly. This is the approach described in [RowSafe](#).

RowSafe Updates

The 2026 updates to RowSafe have been completed and the 2026 version should be published soon here [RowSafe - British Rowing](#). The updates have been summarised, and this summary will also be available on this page.

The updated version of RowSafe contains the following three new sections: -

- 8.6.5. Stroke and Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA)
- 8.8. The Health Benefits of Intensive exercise for older adults.
- 10.4. Beach Sprint Risk Management

It also contains: -

- a Specimen Safety and Environmental Policy that clubs can use if they wish
- advice on passage through locks
- the tools and equipment that trailer drivers should carry
- more advice on what to do if someone collapses
- more guidance on dealing with antisocial behaviour

Analysis of the 2025 Audit Responses

Audit returns have been analysed from the 501 clubs that responded. Some clubs have many members, and some have few, but the sample size is so large that these results should be indicative of the experience of Members of the Rowing Community. Some clubs share premises with host clubs.

This is a summary of the numerical results.

- 392 clubs (78%) have used the standard British Rowing Safety Policy
- 501 clubs (100%) agree to abide by RowSafe

In addition, some clubs incorporate the British Rowing Safety Policy into other Policies.

When asked about the availability of Defibrillators (AEDs): -

- 331 clubs (66%) reported that there was an AED In the Club
- 121 clubs (24%) reported that there was an AED Close to the Club but not In the Club
- 20 clubs (4%) reported that there was an AED both In the Club and Close to the Club
- 45 clubs (9%) reported that there was an AED at another Known Location

When asked whether the Club Rowing Safety Adviser had completed the Advanced Risk Assessment Module (as advised in RowSafe): -

- 229 clubs (46%) answered “Yes”
- 181 clubs (36%) answered “To be completed”, indicating that this is planned
- 85 clubs (17%) answered “No”

When asked how the club ensures members competence and confidence in the water clubs responded: -

- 306 clubs (61%) by Assessment
- 281 clubs (56%) use a Capsize Test
- 264 clubs (53%) use their membership form
- 176 clubs (35%) use a Practical Staged Introduction
- 170 clubs (34%) use a Sign Off
- 145 clubs (29%) use a Float Test
- 65 clubs (13%) use an online method

Clearly these are not mutually exclusive, and some clubs use a variety of methods.

When asked about the method of Assessment of Launch Driver Competence: -

- 342 clubs (68%) rely on RYA Training
- 186 clubs (37%) rely on Proven Experience
- 145 clubs (29%) rely on Local Assessment
- 28 clubs (6%) have Reassessments

Again, these are not mutually exclusive.

When asked about other water users with whom they share the water, clubs responded: -

- 425 clubs (85%) share the water with Canoeists
- 395 clubs (79%) share the water with Paddleboarders
- 360 clubs (72%) share the water with other Rowing or Gig Clubs
- 344 clubs (69%) share the water with Fishermen (Anglers)
- 323 clubs (64%) share the water with Private Motorboats
- 247 clubs (49%) share the water with Commercial Passenger Vessels
- 233 clubs (47%) share the water with Houseboats
- 225 clubs (45%) share the water with Open Water Swimmers
- 184 clubs (37%) share the water with Self Drive Hire Motorboats
- 173 clubs (35%) share the water with Sailing Dinghies
- 83 clubs (17%) share the water with Sailing Yachts
- 55 clubs (11%) share the water with Commercial Freight Vessels
- 48 clubs (10%) share the water with Jet Skis (personal watercraft – PWC)
- 21 clubs (4%) share the water with eFoils
- 44 clubs (9%) share the water with other water users (e.g. Dragon Boats, Kayaks, etc)

Clearly these are not mutually exclusive, and some clubs share the water with several other types of users.

Clubs were asked about hazards downstream of the area where they operate.

- 230 clubs (46%) operate upstream of a Weir
- 57 clubs (11%) operate upstream of a Sluice
- 12 clubs (2%) operate upstream of an Outlet
- 11 clubs (2%) operate upstream of a Spillway
- 3 clubs (1%) operate upstream of a Tower

Of these hazards: -

- 134 clubs (27%) reported that they are Across the waterway
- 98 clubs (20%) reported that they are to the Side of the waterway
- 58 clubs (12%) reported that they are in the Middle of the waterway

When asked about protection: -

- 91 clubs (18%) reported that the draw off has a Barrier
- 79 clubs (16%) reported that the draw off has a Boom
- 74 clubs (15%) reported that the draw off has a Cable
- 21 clubs (4%) reported that the draw off has some other form of physical protection

When asked about warnings: -

- 182 clubs (36%) reported that there are Warning Signs
- 83 clubs (17%) reported that there are Markers
- 82 clubs (16%) reported that there are Buoys
- 38 clubs (8%) reported that there are None