



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

February 2026

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incident Reports for February

Take Care when Spinning

An 8+ spinning in the spinning zone when an 8+ from another club tried to row past. There was a minor collision and some underwater damage to one of the boats.

In another incident, a 4- was turning at the bend to go back upstream, as the 4x, also going upstream, came round the corner. The four was being pushed towards the bank by a strong current as the 4x tried to avoid the 4-. There was a minor collision. The navigation authority code of practice for this river requests that boats don't stop or turn on bends.

In a further incident the cox of an 8+ instructed their crew to turn without noticing another 8+ behind them. They stopped mid turn so that the other 8+ could pass. It was recommended that if the cox has difficulty looking astern then they should ask the rower at stroke what they can see.

In another incident an 8+ was waiting in the designated but congested spinning zone for their turn to spin from the downstream flow to the upstream flow. A 1.5 boat length space appeared as a crew moved upstream in the queue. The 8+ did not move up to follow them, so another crew began to spin into the space. This crew rowed on all 8s despite the bows of the first mentioned boat being in front of them. A collision was just avoided.

In another incident, twice while spinning an 8+ came uncomfortably close to colliding with another 8+. The cox was slow to respond despite shouts from members of the other crew.



Take care in strong crosswinds

An 8+ was caught by a gust of wind when launching and was blown into the nearby Marina. The crew were able to extract the boat after several minutes, but the blades, bow ball and stern collided with moored houseboats.

In another incident, a Beginner Senior 4- was pushing off from a pontoon when wind pushed them back onto the pontoon, they were unable to clear the space safely and a blade got caught underneath another boat on the pontoon. This led to a balance issue, and the inexperienced crew capsized.

Please take care to plan your manoeuvres when the wind is strong.



Coxes need lifejackets

A cox in a masters 8+ was reported as not wearing a lifejacket in "red flag" conditions and when wearing heavy fleece type top. Please ensure that your cox wears a correctly fitted lifejacket.

Having too much fun afloat

We all want to have fun afloat and having fun can mean different things to different people. However, there are times when rowers have to be serious and exercise due care and attention.

All four rowers in a beginner junior 4x were at the catch ready to row off. One let go of his blades briefly to be funny, then other three copied and all let go of their blades, resulting in a capsize. The rowers were told to climb onto the upturned boat. The crew was rescued and the boat recovered.

In another incident, a beginner junior 4x+ were rowing and began to veer over towards the left-hand side of the river. Despite numerous calls from both the coach in the launch the cox didn't respond with their steering. Evasive action was then needed and the coach instructed bow pair to hold up on green, bow pair didn't react and were talking among themselves. The 4x+ lodged itself in the trees and bushes with the stern starting to be pushed downstream. The boat could not be removed. The crew was recovered into launches and the boat was removed.

Take care of coaches and encourage them to take care of themselves

A Launch driver fainted whilst alongside the crew they were coaching due to intense cold and slow heart rate. A crew member of the 4+ transferred into the launch and steered it to a pontoon, only 5 yards away. The coach was transferred to the pontoon and an ambulance was called. The coach was taken to hospital and kept in overnight for observation. They have subsequently recovered.

Coaches of early morning outings are advised to take hot drinks in launch and wear more layers of warm clothing.

Take care to check “elevators”

Wooden “elevators” were being used to take down a 2x from a high rack when one of the elevators broke. The boat came to rest on the extended rack just below. It was fortunate that there was no damage or injury. The club has removed its wooden elevators and only metal ones will be used in future.

Take care to keep a good lookout

During a Head race a 2x was proceeding downstream, having completed the course, and a 4x was proceeding upstream to the start. Both were initially on their respective sides of the river, but both had moved towards to centre and collided. It was a slow speed collision, the bow of the 4x struck the middle of the 2x. The 2x capsized. A launch rescued the two rowers within minutes; the 4x proceeded to the start.

Please remember to keep a good lookout even when moving slowly.



Take care to do what you are trained to do

A rower in a 1x capsized and the safety boat was there in seconds. The rower climbed on top of his boat and from there onto the safety boat where, by chance, they had a full set of dry clothes. The safety boat crew turned the boat back over and emptied it and the rower got back in and rowed back to base. The rower did as he had been trained to do and this made the rescue easy and quick.

In another incident a rower in a 1x capsized and followed the Capsize drill by letting the panic subside first. The capsize drills undertaken by the club in November definitely proved their worth. The rower was able to complete the outing as originally planned.

Take extra care when rowing in the dark

A 4- took a wide line when steering round a bend and collided an un-lit pontoon that the steersman didn't see in the dark until it was too late. There was damage to the bow of the boat but no damage to the pontoon. Please take extra care when rowing in the dark.

In another incident in the dark an 8+ slowed after completing a piece and an 8+ that was behind them nearly rowed into the stern of the first 8+. A similar incident happened again later. It was reported that "the cox was focused on coxing our piece and keeping a look out in our direction of travel, not looking behind at boats following us". This is not acceptable and if the cox is not aware of what is behind the then they should ask the stroke for help.

Take care not to be selfish

One 8+ was overtaking another 8+ at a particularly tight point on the river and came significantly off station and almost collided with a 4- travelling in the opposite direction. The 4- changed course to avoid the collision. The cox of the 8+ said they did not want to stop their piece. There was a similar incident in a later outing with the same 8+.

Please can coxes take greater care of the safety of their crew and other crews. It is always better to stop during pieces than to risk a collision or force another crew to take avoiding action.

Mind your wash

There were complaints from the owner of a narrow boat stating that the wash from passing launches caused the keels of their boat to be repeatedly driven into contact with the canal bottom. Please consider other people when driving a launch and please be mindful of your wash.

It is good to talk

There was some disagreement between two clubs with different boathouses but using the same stretch of water about the route one club uses to approach their landing. It was recommended that both clubs meet together, off the water, to try to find a mutually agreeable resolution to this issue.

Take care in fast flows

Due to high water and fast flow, the 2x was pushed into branches on the riverbank and became trapped by the flow. The safety launch was sent to the location and the crew transferred into the launch in order to extricate the boat which at this point was swamped.

The club's safety procedure worked fairly well, and the crew were returned to the club. However, the time taken to realise that the crew were missing was lengthy as the crew were out of sight and were the last boat out. It was decided to position the launch in a better location and also to issue radios.

Take care of rowers with asthma when the weather is cold

A rower had an outing in a 1x then rowed in an 8+. They had an Asthma attack during a series of training pieces. The rower was recovered into the launch. They used their inhaler several times. They became hypothermic. The coach drove the launch back to the club at speed. The rower was shivering and breathing with difficulty. They were taken into a warm area and given food and hot water to drink. Luckily trainee university medics were on hand to advise. The rower started to recover and, when they were no longer feeling faint, used an exercise bike to get blood flowing again (as recommended by medics). The rower recovered and was driven home.

The following was included in a bulletin to club members:

- Do not attend the club if you are unwell. This could impact crew members as well as training activities putting others at risk.
- Fuel up (eat) between outings.
- Do not row again in wet clothes.
- Use foil blankets / survival bags in launch.
- If hypothermic, important to change first into dry clothes. Have a hot drink and a snack.
- Use light exercise while recovering to allow blood and heat to circulate.
- Reminder that emergency inhalers and medication should be carried with athletes on board which was vital on this occasion.

Take care to coordinate where you stop crews to coach them

A 4x rounded a bend and came to a stop on a corner where an 8+ from another club was in the middle right of the canal about to receive some coaching. A coach in a launch signalled the 4x to go around and the steersperson chose to go on the port side of the 8+, this put the 4x on the wrong side of the canal. As 4x came around the corner another 8+ was coming up the straight, there were last minute calls to hold up and the 4x tried to hold up on its starboard side to avoid a collision. The boats collided and 4x capsized. The crew was rescued by coaches in launches.

Please take care to remain on the correct side of the waterway when overtaking and take particular care when overtaking around bends as view of oncoming crews is obstructed. Consider agreeing suitable places for coaches to stop and talk to crews.

Take care with launch trim

A collision between a launch and a 4x was narrowly averted when a launch travelling upstream at top speed failed to see us and was heading straight towards the 4x; the 4x was in the correct place in the waterway. The steerer of the launch was unable to see the 4x because the bows of the launch were so far tilted up as the driver was sitting by the engine and had no forward visibility. The bow rower in the 4x shouted continuously but the launch driver failed to move until the last moment.

Please avoid having the lone occupant of a launch sitting close to the transom. Use a tiller extension or have another person sitting near the bows of the launch.

Take care where you sit

A coach was waiting for the landing stage to clear and was sitting in a boat trestle. The trestle canvas suddenly gave way and tore open. The coach fell but was able to catch his weight with his arms. The coach was not injured.

Follow this link

To report a Safety Incident, please follow this link [British Rowing Incident Reporting](#). Please bookmark this page.

Risk Assessment for Clubs visiting other clubs

A school has invited several local schools to their stretch of water for a time trial. I was asked what safety plan would be needed. It's an invitational event sent to six schools; does the host school need to provide an Event risk assessment?

The response was that it may help to look at [RowSafe - British Rowing](#) Section 3.5, Training Camps and Rowing on Unfamiliar Waters. Visiting clubs should produce their own risk assessment based on the information that the host club provides to them. This information should include the host club's: -

- own risk assessment
- navigation plan
- safety rules
- etc.

There is a long list of actions for the visiting club to complete with the assistance of the host club.

RowSafe Updates

The 2026 version of RowSafe has been issued and can be found here [RowSafe - British Rowing](#). The updates have been summarised, and this summary is available here [2026-RowSafe-changes.pdf](#).

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

Rowing on Red Boards etc.

There was a request from a Club Rowing Safety Adviser who is at one of many clubs that have been struggling with the increasing number of extended periods where their section of river has been closed to navigation by the relevant navigation authority due to "dangerous conditions" created by flood water.

The club has endorsed certain boats rowing in these conditions having undertaken and documented a risk assessment prior to an outing. However, as the Club's Safety Advisor is not happy with this approach, they have been tasked with exploring what BR's position is on this matter. The CRSA believes that, as a committee they should not be endorsing such activity, whether a risk assessment has been conducted or not, when a recognised authority has closed the river to navigation due to what they deem in their expert opinion to be dangerous conditions.

The CRSA feels that with the growing effects of global warming, such conditions are likely to only get worse in the coming years. Any help or guidance or position from BR's perspective on this matter would be most welcome.

The response was that I wrote about this in [HRSA-Monthly-Report-December-2024.pdf](#) where I said: -

Rowing on Red Boards, etc.

There was some discussion about rowing on red boards or in conditions where the Navigation Authority advises against going afloat. This resulted from a question from a rower that included a photo of a river that looked benign but was, at the time, under "red board advice".

It is not unusual for clubs, including sailing clubs and canoe clubs to establish protocols that govern their use of the water when it is not advised. This should be based on a documented risk assessment. There is training material, on how to complete a risk assessment, here [Course: Advanced Risk Assessment | Home](#).

This is not just about flow. It can be perfectly safe to navigate in a smoothly flowing strong stream providing there are no fixed obstructions (moorings, bridge supports, buoys, pontoons, shallow and narrow areas where the flow speed increases, etc.) to be swept into or across. You can see what happens at bends in the Safety Alert here [Safety-Alert-Flow-around-bends-in-rivers.pdf](#). Flow over weirs is described in the [Safety-Alert-Flow-over-Weirs.pdf](#). Also remember that strong wind contributes to hazards.

There probably will be venues where it is never safe to go afloat on red boards. It is incumbent on those clubs to find somewhere else to row in that eventuality. Doing everything you can to make an activity safe does not mean that it actually is safe. Sometimes even with all the precautions we can provide the risk will remain unacceptable. This can be a difficult concept to accept but it has to be accepted.

The club risk assessment should be documented in detail and used to define the conditions, if there are any, under which it is safe to go afloat on Red Boards. These "conditions" should also specify who can go afloat, where they can go, in which boats and with what support. These conditions should be specified in writing and well communicated. They should be objective and based on measurements or facts and never rely on opinion. Once specified they should never be weakened. Club discipline is important in this context. These conditions should be incorporated into club rules. and nobody should be able to countermand these rules.

It is sometimes easy to be misled by looking at the stretch of river outside the boathouse. The flow in this area may be smooth, but this is no indication that the flow in other areas will be the same. There may well be other areas when the flow is not so benign.

I further explained that this is not about rowers making risk assessments prior to outings. It is about considered risk assessments being made by the club and these being used to define the conditions under which specified rowers may go afloat in specified boats, with specified support, and in specified locations. Prior to each outing the rowers simply have to check the conditions and confirm that these conditions satisfy the requirements set by the club. This is where club discipline comes into effect.

There was a follow-up question about the liability of the club Committee. The response explained the legal concept of *volenti non fit injuria* ("to a willing person, no injury is done") and its limitations. The requirements of the defence are that there should be: -

- A voluntary
- Agreement
- Made in full knowledge of the nature and extent of the risk.

There is further information here [Volenti non fit injuria — e-lawresources.co.uk](http://e-lawresources.co.uk/Volenti-non-fit-injuria).

It may help for the club to insist that if rowers choose to go afloat in these conditions (Red Board but within the club's specified limits as they apply to these rowers, in these boats, rowing in this area) then they should sign a disclaimer and register it with the club.

Advanced Risk Assessment Training

A Club Rowing Safety Adviser (CRSA) wrote to say that they were having difficulty viewing the videos in this online learning module. This was referred to a colleague who identified and fixed the problem. The problem was due a conflict with the user's browser settings. The CRSA has since written to say that the fix was successful and that they now have complete access to the online module.

Last month I presented some statistics from the recent Safety Audit. I was disappointed to find that only 46% of CRSAs have completed the Advanced Risk Assessment training even though in the CRSA Job Description in Section 3.4 of RowSafe it says: -

Club Rowing Safety Adviser

Club Rowing Safety Advisers are expected to: -

- *Have completed the Advanced Risk Assessment Training.*

The Advanced Risk Assessment module can be accessed here [Course: Advanced Risk Assessment | Home](#). This module is an extension of the Safety Basics module that can be accessed here [Course: Safety Basics - Understanding and Managing Risk | Home](#). Both pages can be accessed from the Online Learning page here [All courses | Home](#).

If you are a CRSA and have not completed this training, then please do so without delay. Please contact me at safety@britishrowing.org if you need any help to do so.

A Lifejacket for a rower with Epilepsy

There was a request for information on an auto-inflation lifejacket suitable for a rower with epilepsy. The individual risk assessment for this rower had identified this to be necessary. The correspondent was considering lifejackets described here [Commercial Lifejackets | ISO & MED/SOLAS Approved | Crewsaver](#). The club does not already have any auto-inflation lifejackets. Those used by coxes, etc., are manual inflation.

The response was that Crewsaver is a reputable supplier of lifejackets although I would not particularly recommend their Commercial range, however, this one may be appropriate [Crewfit 150N | Survitec](#). Lifejackets in the Commercial range are designed and made for people at work. Some of them have wide clean out casings.

One of the lifejackets in the leisure range ([Leisure Lifejackets | Advanced Technology Lifejackets | Crewsaver](#)) may well be suitable. There are some common lifejacket features that are not needed by rowers. Harness attachment points are used by people who need to attach themselves to their boat so that they do not get left behind if they fall overboard. Spray hoods are used at sea where there is a risk of drowning in spray from waves. Buoyancy of much more than 150N is not needed. A lifejacket light is not needed unless rowers row in the dark.

The final selection may well be influenced by price, and this can be discussed with Crewsaver or the supplier.

The following further advice was provided: -

- Please explain to your rower that it would be helpful if they inflate their lifejacket before they have an episode. If someone is going to enter the water, then it is best to do so with the lifejacket already inflated.
- Please ensure that your new auto inflation lifejacket is clearly distinguishable from your manual inflation ones. It would help if it were a different colour.
- Thigh straps (sometimes called crotch straps) are important as they work to prevent the lifejacket from coming off over the wearer's head as they enter the water. There is more information here [How to fit lifejacket crotch straps](#) and here [Why Your Life Jacket Should Have Crotch Straps!](#).

Other makes of lifejacket are also available.

Lifejacket product recall

In July 2025 a lifejacket manufacturer issued product recall notices for the following lifejackets, Helly Hansen Navigare Comfort, Navigare Scan, Junior Safe+ and Kid Safe+ Lifejackets. There is more information here [Notice of Product Recall | Helly Hansen](#).

Work with the Cornish Pilot Gig Association (CPGA)

Information about incident reports that mention Cornish Pilot Gigs is routinely shared with the safety team at the CPGA. There was one such report in February.

Are capsizes highly unlikely?

It was reported that many people write in their risk assessment for competitions that a capsized is "highly unlikely". It was suggested that capsized is highly likely at competitions as someone usually does capsized.

The response was that when we consider risk, we think about the probability of a hazardous event occurring taking into account the barriers to make it less likely, and the severity of harm should it occur taking into account the controls to reduce the severity. The level of risk is calculated from those two considerations. This process is described in the advanced risk assessment training.

In the case of a capsized at a competition, the probability of an individual rower capsizing is quite low but there are so many of them that the probability of somebody capsizing is quite high.

Providing the competition provides a sensible level of support then the severity of harm should be quite low.

The resultant level of risk will hopefully be tolerable. This may depend on the water temperature, level of congestion, etc.

Large Motorboats on Canal and River Trust Waters

There have been problems for some time with interactions between rowing boats and barges, narrow boats, etc. on Canal and River Trust (C&RT) waters. A colleague has been liaising with the Management of the C&RT to encourage them to act when such incidents happen. I have been providing information from incident reports so that my colleague can raise these with their contact at the C&RT.

It is difficult for the C&RT to act if they do not have evidence to identify the boats involved. If you are involved in an interaction with such a boat then it would help if you could provide photographic or video evidence that identifies the other boat and, if possible, depicts the action that it took. Boat Registration numbers are the best form of identification.

Sports Safety Group

I am a member of the Sports Safety Group; this is a group of like-minded people who support various UK Sports national Governing Bodies on Safety and meet to share experience. Some members of this group have been discussing Incident Reporting and sharing our experience. I have written a briefing on the British Rowing Incident Reporting System and shared them with the group. These are included in this report in Appendix I.

Appendix I The British Rowing Incident Reporting System

We are interested in all Incidents including those where harm was, or could have been, caused. We encourage all incidents, including no harm incidents and near misses to be reported. Incidents may relate to interactions with non-rowers and an increasing number relate to anti-social behaviour normally by non-rowers directed at rowers.

When the system is working well, we give prizes to the clubs that report most incidents each year, this includes prizes for smaller clubs based on the relationship between their size and the number of incidents they have reported. The Prize consists of a Certificate of Commendation signed by the Chair of British Rowing and the Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser.

We regard Incident Reports as positive contributions to rowing safety made by members of the rowing community (usually). The more reports we receive the happier we feel.

The success of the Incident Reporting system lies in the sharing culture that it has helped to generate. This cannot be underestimated. Nobody can force anyone to report anything and without this sharing and positive culture our system and the process it supports (see below) would fail.

We take great care to nurture this culture. We thank people for their reports. We never blame or admonish anyone as a consequence of a report. This culture has taken time and effort to build but could easily be damaged.

We recognise that the success of the Incident Reporting system and the process that it supports, has nothing to do with the reporting infrastructure. It is all about the people and the way we treat them.

Reports involving other members of organisations (e.g. PaddleUK, the Cornish Pilot Gig Association, etc.) are shared with colleagues in those organisations. Other than that, we treat reports as confidential.

The Incident Reporting system is intended to identify learning; it is not intended to be a forum where fault or blame can be assigned. Whenever anyone tries to do this then they are informed of this convention.

We discourage the use of names except where people are being praised. We are particularly keen that the names of Juniors are not included in reports.

The HRSA (and perhaps others) can edit reports to remove words that would cause offence. (This is rarely necessary.) I sometimes correct reports at the request of the reporter.

The deal is that members of the Rowing Community and others report incidents and we identify the learning from them and feedback the learning to the Rowing Community. Like this: -

1. British Rowing (the NGB) provides and maintains an Incident Reporting system (software and supporting infrastructure).
2. Members of the Rowing Community are encouraged to report incidents. Others can do so too.
3. Reports of Incidents are notified to: -
 - a. The reporter,
 - b. the clubs involved,

- c. The Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser (HRSA),
 - d. The Regional Rowing Safety Adviser (RRSAs).
 - e. Some members of staff.
4. The HRSA selects those reports with learning points and summarises the learning anonymously in the Monthly Reports ([HRSA Monthly Report Archive - British Rowing](#)). These are distributed to all clubs and others.
 5. Where there is a significant lesson learned then this is communicated as a Safety Alert ([Safety Alerts - British Rowing](#)).
 6. The contents of the previous year's Monthly Reports is used as one of the data sources for the annual update of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#).
 7. When the system is working reliably, the HRSA (or, more precisely, his wife) produces an annual analysis such as the one here [PowerPoint Presentation](#)

Reports can be opened for comment by the HRSA and RRSAs. People from the clubs involved, and others, are invited to add comments. Comments typically are used to: -

- Thank the reporter for making the report.
- Ask for more detailed information.
- Ask other clubs involved to comment.
- Add further information and comments
- Provide advice or recommend action to the club(s) or individuals concerned.
- Ask the clubs concerned about the actions they can take to avoid a reoccurrence