



BRITISHROWING

# Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

April 2026

Stephen Worley

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

## Awards for Coaches

Last month I reported that

- Richard White and Jason Foster, of Bedford School BC
- Lily Boulton and Daniella Flemons, of Bedford Modern School BC, and
- George Foot, Sharon Mower and Jo Stringer of Maidenhead Rowing Club

have been nominated for awards.

I have recently been notified that they will each receive a Royal Humane Society Certificate of Commendation. Please join me in congratulating them.

## Incidents in April

### Take care to ensure that your rescue launch is ready to use

There was concern about the late return of a 4x in windy weather, so it was decided to use an additional launch to search for them. Unfortunately, the key to the launch wasn't in the launch bag as expected. A key was found in a drawer but when tried it was for a different launch. The driver phoned another club member who told them where the launch key was and how to recognise it. All this delayed the launch crew by at least 20 minutes, maybe longer. The launch proceeded in the direction that the crew had written that they would go. The launch failed to find the crew who returned from the opposite direction.

Please take care to ensure that your club is well organised and that everyone Does What They Say They Will Do (DWYSYWD).

### Anti-social behaviour

Two pairs of shoes were left away from the water, near the landing stage during a session. When they returned the rowers noticed two of the shoes were floating in the lake. Near the club was a group of young boys still playing near the next fishing landing. The shoes were recovered and there was no confrontation.

We are approaching that time of year when anti-social behaviour can become troublesome. The advice in [RowSafe - British Rowing](#) is: -

- Don't REACT
- REMOVE yourself from the situation
- REPORT to the Navigation Authority, Police, British Rowing, etc.
- Share information about anti-social events and their location
- Avoid areas where anti-social behaviour is likely to happen

For further information see [Safety-Alert-Coping-with-the-behaviour-of-others-June-2023.pdf](#).

## **Take care to avoid head on collisions.**

Collisions can be avoided by taking care to maintain the correct position on the waterway and keeping a good lookout. Particular care is needed on bends. However, the following collisions occurred: -

- A 4x was doing a training piece downstream on a wide part of the river when it strayed onto the other side of the river where it had a significant clash of blades with a 2x travelling in the opposite direction.
- A 2x drifted onto the wrong side of the river and collided with a 1x doing a race piece.
- A 2- and a 2x were travelling in opposite directions when they collided at speed. Nearby rowers reported that neither of the crews were close enough their respective sides of the river and neither looked ahead.
- A 2x was rowing downstream too far over the centre line and a 4- was coming upstream, round a bend, not tightly tucked in. This resulted in a clash of blades.
- An upstream 4- collided with downstream 4x, the boats were both not on the correct side of the river.
- A 2- and a 2x were both doing high pressure pieces in the middle of the river in opposite directions and collided at speed.
- An 8+ was rowing towards a bridge as a 1x was coming through the bridge in the opposite direction. Both boats held up to stop but there was a low-speed collision. There was no injury to rowers in either boat, no damage and the single didn't capsize.
- A 4- was on the wrong side of the river during their warmup, rounded a blind corner and didn't see a 2x. There was a collision during normal training and not in a race.
- A 4x was heading upstream and a 1x was heading the opposite direction, the 4x was in the centre of the river. Neither crew had seen the other and the boats collided.
- Two 2-s collided head on causing damage to back stays and injury to rowers' backs.
- Two 1xs were doing pieces in opposite directions. They both strayed into the centre of the river and collided. One rower was hit in the lower back and there was some boat damage.
- Two 4xs clashed oars when travelling in opposite directions close to a bend in the river. One crew was doing a piece and had strayed from the correct river position. The second crew was broadly in position but bow mistakenly concluded that the boat ahead was moving in the same direction.

Please remember that it takes at least two crews to have a head on collision. If you are involved in a collision then think what you will do differently, even if you were in the correct place, to avoid collisions in future. Keep to the correct position on the waterway and maintain a good lookout. Practise the Emergency Stop as shown here [Emergency Stop Drill](#) and review this [Safety-Alert-collision-avoidance.pdf](#).

## **Polarised sunglasses can help**

A 2x collided with a large log that had not been seen. The RRSA commented that it can be difficult to see logs in the water. If it is sunny then polarised sunglasses cut down the glare off the water.

### **Collisions can occur on land too**

There was a 4- on trestles in the boathouse which was moved so that another boat could be taken out. Both boats were being carried, and the boats collided causing damage. There was no need to rush.

It is not just rowers who should keep a good lookout. An Umpire collided with the arched section of an overhead road bridge when walking to their station. The umpire admitted that they were looking at their radio at the time.



In another incident a coach on a bike was busy watching a rower and ensuring that they were lined up for a bridge. There is a bay window that protrudes out into the path slightly. The coach caught their handlebar on the protruding brickwork! This resulted in a broken nose and tooth, split lip, grazes to hands and knees and very dented pride!

### **Do not hold crews at frontstops**

A 4+ capsized when doing “roll-ups” as a whole crew. Once in the water the crew reacted as they had been taught and they were rescued by their coaches. Being in the catch position with the blades square in the water is very unstable and balance cannot be maintained by adjusting hand heights. When doing roll-ups with an inexperienced crew it is much safer to complete the exercise in pairs or with some of the rowers using their oars to hold the boat level.

### **Take care to collect evidence**

There were several reports of rowers being impeded by large boats moored in places where they should not be moored or navigated in a dangerous or inconsiderate manner. Please encourage your crews that, if this happens to them, they should try to note the identification details of these boats (name and registration number). It would also help to take photos if it is safe to do so. Identification evidence is useful when making reports to the Navigation Authority.

### **Consider warning others on the towpath**

An Umpire was walking along the towpath carrying a rucksack and a lifejacket when they saw a cyclist coming in the opposite direction at speed. The Umpire moved out of the way but one of the handlebars snagged the strap of their lifejacket. The cyclist was thrown off their bike, and the umpire was pulled over. Neither suffered serious injury.

It is not possible to close the towpath, and there is a lot of fast cycle traffic. It was suggested that it may be worth putting up signs on regatta days to inform cyclists that the towpath will be crowded and advising cyclists to reduce speed.

## Take care when tying boats to trailers

In one incident a 2x was tied to a trailer rack, and the end of the boat slipped off the rack and dangled onto the motorway. The boat was re-tied securely and made safe. It was clear that a second restraining tie to the centre post would prevent the strap from coming free over the end of the rack bar.

In another incident, one end of a 1/4 section of an 8+ came free of the trailer. A boat strap came off the end of the rack and the section fell onto the motorway but the boat remained secured at the other end.

Straps can loosen and pass over the end of trailer arms. Tapered sections of boats should be prevented from moving fore or aft along the trailer such that a narrower part of the boat is under the straps. Horizontal straps running along the axis of the boat between a trailer arm and a boat stretcher should be used to prevent this movement.

These methods of strapping a boat to a trailer adds an extra strap to prevent the boat from moving towards the end of the trailer arm [Double Strapping](#) and [How to tie a rowing shell onto a trailer](#).

It may also help to have a vertical rope or strap joining the ends of each set of trailer arms.

There is further guidance in section 7.2 of [RowSafe - British Rowing](#)

## Take care when loading and towing your trailer

A trailer “capsized” when being towed on a motorway. The trailer fishtailed at first and then the driver slowed down but the fishtail worsened and the trailer turned over. No other vehicles were involved. The driver thought that the gusty cross wind contributed. It is not possible to determine what caused this incident.

Please take care when loading your trailer. Optimum load position is not just a matter of trailer nose weight as the following videos demonstrate: -

- [Busting trailer weight distribution myths, demonstrated](#)
- [Safe Trailing Demonstration | U-Haul | How To Properly Load A Trailer](#)
- [10 things that make your trailer sway](#) and
- [Stability of Towing a Load with Dr Jos Darling](#)

These demonstrations show that stability is dependent on weight distribution and speed. Greater speed = less stability.



## **Take Care with Quick Release Wing Riggers**

While practising starts the quick release rigger detached from a 2x. The boat didn't capsize and could be rowed back to the boat house.

There is information here [Microsoft Word - WinTech Quick Release Wing Rigger Fitting 2.docx](#) on the Correct fitting of WinTech Quick Release Wing Riggers.

## **Do what you are trained to do**

A rower in a 1x capsized in choppy water and was rescued using the buddy rescue technique by a fellow rower in another. They did what they had been taught to do in their capsize and recovery training.

## **Safety equipment is there for a reason**

During a Coach Assessment I found that a club's equipment was far from safe. The kill cord fitting on the launches had been disabled and the crotch straps on lifejackets had been taped up so that they could not be used and were not being used. (I removed the adhesive tape from the one that I used.)

This was reported in an Incident Report, I opened the report and have just added an invitation for the club to comment.

Links to the following Safety Alerts were added to the Incident Report: -

- [Safety-Alert-Safety-Equipment-can-save-your-life-1.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-February-2015-Launch-Driving.pdf](#)
- [Safety-Alert-Launch-pre-use-checks.pdf](#) and
- [Safety-Alert-February-2015-Lifejackets.pdf](#)

If you are in any doubt about the need to use lifejacket crotch straps, then please watch this video [Why Your Life Jacket Should Have Crotch Straps!](#)

## Transporting boats by road

I have been told by several people that Traffic Police are becoming increasingly interested in the security of loads carried on Rowing Boat Trailers. They are concerned that items carried in the “boxes” at the base of the trailer may be lost onto the road and cause an accident. One Officer explained that these items should be restrained in such a way that they would not leave the trailer even if the trailer was to fall on its side.



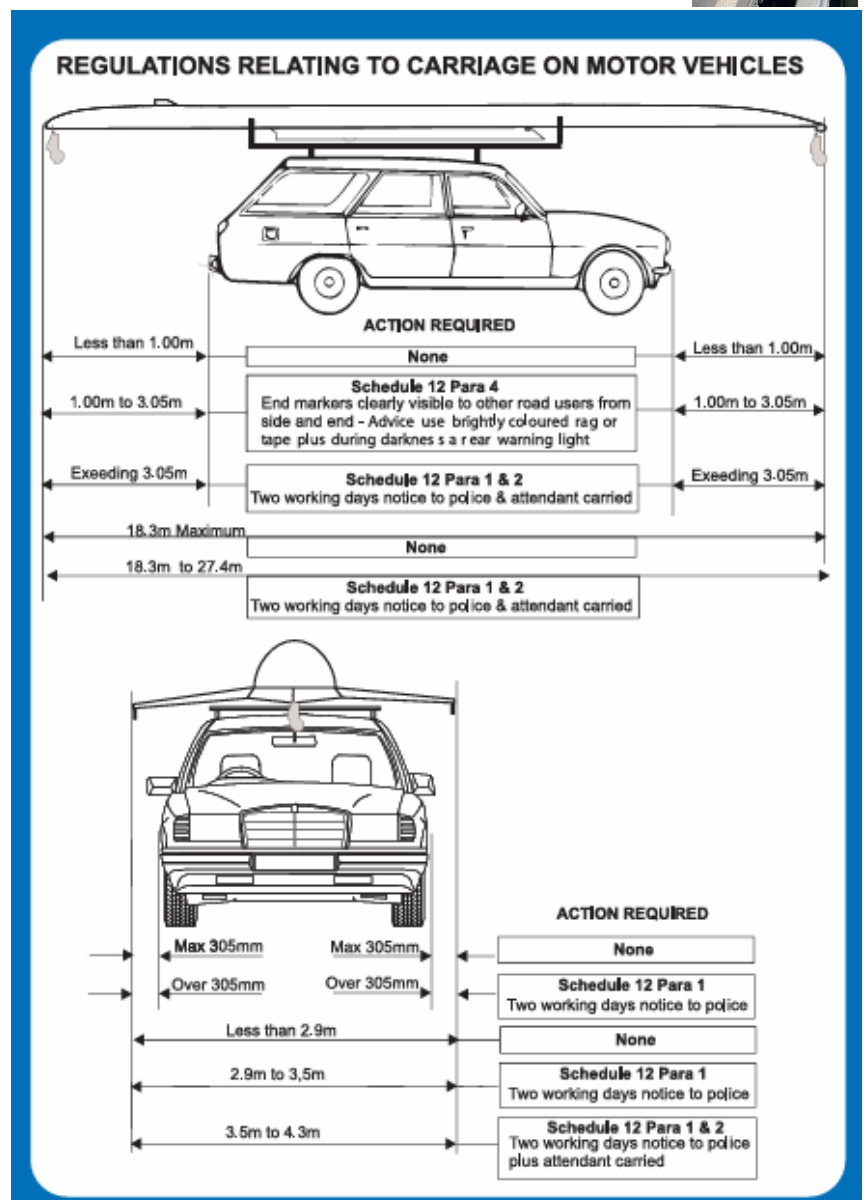
It is recommended that cargo nets are used to ensure that items in the “boxes” cannot accidentally fall from the trailer. Hooks can be fitted to the perimeter of the boxes to hold the cargo nets. Cargo nets are available from [Amazon](#) and other suppliers (other suppliers are available). Some nets have hooks that attach to the base of the trailer box see [here](#).



I have also been informed that Traffic Police have expressed concern about the transport of 2xs on roof racks. The large overhangs may be in contravention of [Regulation 82 of The Road Vehicles \(Construction and Use\) Regulations 1986](#).

There is information here on the requirements for the [Transportation of Oar propelled Racing Boats](#). This includes the diagram opposite. This diagram shows that if end markers are clearly visible from side and end then the boat can protrude up to 3.05 metres from the front and back of the car. The advice is to use brightly coloured rag or tape plus, during darkness, a rear warning light.

These special rules for trailers where the load consists of boats propelled solely by oars removes the duty to notify the police in advance.



## Towing a boat (on the water)

I was asked for advice on how to rescue a boat and its crew. The club involved, and several other clubs in the vicinity, operate Celtic Longboats. I am familiar with these boats and have rowed them in the Bristol Channel. This photograph is taken from the club's website: -



The first thing to remember is that people matter and boats can be replaced. Step one in the rescue plan is to take the crew into the rescue boat or boats. Depending on the rescue capacity of the rescue boat this may mean making several trips to a place of safety.

A tow astern of the empty boat is generally the simplest way to tow. Long tows (on a long rope) are generally easier than short tows. An alongside tow may be possible but this can be difficult as the stern of the towing vessel should be astern of the towed vessel as otherwise it is difficult to steer. This will not be easy if the towing vessel (RIB) is much shorter than the towed vessel (rowing boat).

These clubs operate in a relatively sheltered estuary where there are other boats and moorings. In this case a relatively short tow may be appropriate so as to keep better control of the towed vessel. At sea a long tow is usually preferred.

It was also suggested that the club should not wait for a real rescue but practise towing the rowing boat astern of the RIB. With practice they will find that this is not too difficult.

## Mark your boat

Recently an incident occurred when a deflated kayak was found washed up against a tree in a river in a remote area. There was no means of identifying the owner and the Police were concerned that there may be a person in distress.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency have a selection of free safety related resources including adhesive waterproof labels that can be affixed to boats with the owner's contact details.

Given the growth in coastal rowing and the availability of CIX. If you row on the sea or in remote areas then it may help to use one as it may help save your life should you become separated from your boat. See [Waterproof labels for watersport equipment Includes three \(3\) labels - MCA306 - Maritime and Coastguard Agency - Safety materials ordering service](#)

## Rules for Rowing in Fog

There was a request for advice on the rules for rowing in fog. The club's current rule is that participants must be able to see to the far side of the lake (about 300 metres) to row.

There was a situation where the crew an 8+ was so desperate to practise that they went afloat without having this much visibility. They were accompanied by launch and claimed to have full view for steering despite the thick heavy fog.

The club is now receiving questions as a club about what is and isn't safe and it would like to have an easy-to-follow rule for everyone so that other safety rules don't get ignored and deemed pointless. The club's hierarchy permits the captains to have the final say and so the crew was allowed to go out.

The response was Safety Rules define who can row in what conditions and these rules must not be overruled. For some conditions, like wind or rough water conditions the rules may differ by boat size and experience, for example an experienced eight will cope with conditions that would not be safe for a novice sculler.

However, rules relating to visibility should be the same for all rowers and there should be no discretion. Depending on your location, other water users and obstructions, having agreed on a safe distance that is easy to judge, which this club has, all crews should abide by that rule, no exceptions. Your rule of being able to see the other side of the lake is easy to apply.

Many clubs have been unable to get afloat during winter due to the high levels of rainfall, but being desperate to practise is not sufficient reason to ignore safety rules.

## Advice for a club with a rower who has seizures

A club has a rower who was diagnosed with a disorder that can cause seizures over six years ago. The attacks present somewhere between seizures and panic attacks, and there are two types: one is brought on by stress and adrenaline, and one is random. The ones brought on by stress and adrenaline have resulted in the rower having episodes after two competitions.

Epilepsy is a syndrome rather than a disease and each person experiences the condition in a different way. The club is concerned to review this rower's individual risk assessment and has requested the rower to provide updated advice from their doctor. There is concern that the medical advice may not reflect the current situation.

The rower is reluctant to see their doctor due in case the doctor tells them that they are not fit to drive and notifies the DVLA.

My first concern is that the rower wishes to continue to drive their car when they have a condition which the DVLA appears to identify as making driving dangerous. For their own safety and that of others, they should notify the DVLA. If the club can do anything to discourage them from driving, then it should do so.

The DVLA guidance on seizures and epilepsy can be found here [Epilepsy and driving - GOV.UK](#). Our guidance on Rowing with Epilepsy can be found here [Rowing and Epilepsy - British Rowing](#).

## Mental Health Support

There was a request for advice from a club where, in the past, dead bodies have been located in the vicinity, but not by rowers. They also have some members who have experience with mental health and suicide. The club asked where British Rowing mental health support could be found.

Rowers in the UK, report finding, on average, one dead body in the water each year. There is this guidance on how to respond in Section 9.2 of [RowSafe](#).

<p>Finding a dead body in the water.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep everyone, particularly juniors who are not involved in the incident well away.</li> <li>• Call the Emergency Services who will arrange for the body to be removed.</li> </ul>	<p>Distress to rowers and coaches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange for support to rowers and coaches.</li> </ul> <p>Membership of British Rowing entitles members to Mental Health Support through the insurance cover. There is more information here <a href="#">Members</a>. There is also information on Mental Health here <a href="#">Supporting Positive Mental Health - British Rowing</a>.</p>
--	---	---------------------------------------	---

There is information on insurance here [Members](#). There is further information on mental health on the website here [Supporting Positive Mental Health - British Rowing](#).

## Presentation at the RoSPA National Water Safety Conference

Each year about 600 people drown in the UK, about half do so as a means of taking their own lives.

I submitted an abstract for a presentation at this conference. The Abstract was accepted and I have been invited to make a presentation. The abstract contained the following:

*“The [Water Incident Database](#) shows that about half of the UK drownings, with a known or suspected cause, are due to people taking their own lives. Addressing this issue would drive a significant reduction in the number of UK drownings.*

*Reduce the number of drownings by educating anyone who spends time by the water to be aware of people who may be contemplating taking their own lives and encouraging them to intervene.*

*A further objective is to educate people to understand that those who entered the water with this intent usually regret that decision and desire to be rescued.*

*Provide information to help people who spend time on or near the water to intercept others intending to enter the water and to rescue people in the water. Explain the methods of intervention and outline the rewards of doing so.*

*Rowers and their coaches have intervened recently to save at least two people who were intent on taking their own lives. They have also rescued people who entered the water having decided to take their own lives but immediately regretted that decision.*

A large proportion of drowning deaths result from people taking their own lives. This number can be reduced by interventions before they enter the water, recognising that they regret this decision and rescuing them from the water.

**There is more information here: -**

- [National Water Safety Forum Water Incident Database](#)
- British Rowing [Safety-Alert-Small-Talk-Saves-Lives.pdf](#)
- Samaritans [Small Talk Saves Lives | Campaigns | Samaritans](#)”

## Work with other organisations

Relevant incident reports have been shared with Paddle UK and the Cornish Pilot Gig Association.

## Martyn’s Law update

[The Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025](#) received Royal Assent on 3 April 2025. It is expected that the implementation period will be at least 24 months. The Act it applies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The guidance has been issued and can be found here [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025 Statutory Guidance](#). The guidance is lengthy but it includes annotated decision trees, many examples and detailed explanations. There is “Mythbuster” information here [martyns-law-mythbuster.pdf](#).

The guidance explains that excluded premises in Schedule 2 to the Act include parks, gardens and other open-air premises used for recreation or leisure (only applies to open access premises which do not have measures to secure or check that access is restricted).

If, for example, a regatta takes place in a such a public area and there are no access controls then the Act will not apply. However, if it has a ticketed enclosure that is expected to hold a total of 200 people or more (all people including staff, volunteers, etc.) at any one time, then the Act may well apply.

Where the Act does apply, a Responsible Person must be designated, and the event must be notified to the Regulator (the SIA).

The responsible person for qualifying premises or a qualifying event must:

- ensure appropriate public protection procedures (section 5 of the Act) are in place, so far as is reasonably practicable. Public Protection measures can include Evacuation, Invacuation, Lockdown and Communication (see Fig 7 in the [Guidance here](#)).
- co-ordinate with other responsible persons as required, so far as is reasonably practicable (section 8 of the Act)
- notify the Regulator ([Security Industry Authority - GOV.UK](#)) that they have become responsible for qualifying premises or a qualifying event, or that they have ceased to be responsible, and any other information required in regulations (section 9 of the Act)