BRITISH ROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

May 2024

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Rowers Pull Together to save a life at Sea

On Monday, the 22nd of April the Paignton Amateur Rowing Club Gig "Evans Above" was at sea in Torbay. At about 7.30 they were approached by a Torquay Rowing Club coastal 4+ who asked the crew of the gig to make a call for help as there was a man, apparently in distress, in the water. The man was not making much sense.

The gig made its way towards the casualty. There was a Torquay RC coastal 2x waiting with him. They left as they saw the gig approach. The man in the water was fully clothed in a black t-shirt, black jeans, and trainers. He seemed a little confused and wanted the crew of the Gig to take him to Brixham.

The crew of the gig got him into their boat and gave him some clothing as he was showing signs of hypothermia. The cox then called the emergency services as the casualty clearly needed medical attention. The gig, with the rescued man, was then rowed to the nearby Paignton harbour.

It took approximately 15 minutes to get back to the harbour where the emergency services were waiting. At no time did the casualty lose consciousness.

By working together, the crews of these two rowing clubs probably saved this man's life.

It a sad fact that about half the of the 400 or so people who drown in the UK each year do so as a means of committing suicide. Please be alert to opportunities to save a life.

Incidents in May

Keep an eye on what the children are up to

School children moved trestles, entered the boathouse, and ran off with a blade. They took the main lock for buildings and stole the key to the boat cage and threw it into the river. The CCTV recording will be provided to the Police and the Captain will visit local the local school.

It is that time of year when children start to do things that you would prefer them not to. Please be vigilant.

Take care not to let go of the handle

A rower in a 1x was practising 'rigger dips' while stationary. They let go of an oar and fell in.

In another incident a rower in a 2x caught a crab, lost a handle, and slowly tipped in. They decided to hold the handles in future sessions. This resulted in "general teasing. Went out for next session and held on to the handles."

Take care to check hatch covers

Rowers in an 8+ came to catch position while static, the boat tipped (this is an unstable position) and all rowers let go of their blades. The boat capsized and two hatch covers were lost. Please check boats before each outing and ensure that hatch covers are correctly fitted.

Check that the gate is correctly closed

A 2- pushed off from the landing stage, moved onto the correct side of the river and proceeded upstream, accompanied by a spotter on the bank. An unbalanced stroke caused the bowside gate to pop open (having been improperly fastened), resulting in the loss of the bowside blade and capsize into waist deep water. Please take care to check that the gate is correctly closed before pushing off.

In another incident a gate on a 1x was not sufficiently tightened. The gate came open and the boat capsized.

In a further incident the gate came off a 2- which then capsized. Rowers were reminded to tighten top nuts properly and encouraged to check before boating that riggers and top nuts are tight.

Check the boat

A 1x was on a rack but it did not have heel restraints. Fortunately, this was spotted before the rower pushed off from dock. This boat had recently had the shoes changed as a temporary measure and the original shoes had gone missing in the boathouse.

In another incident, a CRSA decided to check the heel restraints of two 4x that were on trestles about to go afloat. A heel restraint of one 4x failed due to deterioration of shoe. The boat was taken out of service. One of heel restraint knots of the other boat was untied. this was made safe. The CWSA will put up poster explaining what needs to be checked and why. The Club Captain will circulate an email to all members reminding everyone to check equipment before boating and the Vice Captains will ensure crews and scullers check equipment before boating. Please consider whether your club should do something similar.

In another incident a bow side gate bolt came loose and was reinstated whilst on water using a spanner. Please take care to always check before going afloat.

In a further incident a blade came out of the gate of a 1x after 11km of paddling and the sculler capsized. The boat was taken out of service to replace the gate.

In yet another incident a pre-outing check showed that a quick release strap (for the Velcro fastenings of the shoes) was trapped between the heel restraint and the shoe so that it was not possible to release the foot quickly and the heel restraints were tied in a very complicated manner. The heel restraints were retied and the quick release strap was released.

Check the crew too

A 4+ was seen to have a cox who was not wearing a personal flotation device.

Keep a good lookout

The following incidents were due to rowers not keeping a good lookout: -

- A rower in a 1x neglected to keep a proper lookout and hit red channel marker at speed. The quick release wing rigger detached and the rower entered the water. Despite pulling the shoe release cord, the rower needed to reach up to pull their foot free of the shoe. Buoyancy in the oars stopped the wing rigger from sinking. The rower wrote that "this was a perfectly avoidable incident, which paying proper attention to the course would have prevented entirely".
- A 4x was doing a practice racing piece and collided head on with a 1x. The 1x capsized and the 4x sustained some minor damage to the bow canvas and breakwater. A nearby coaching launch rescued the rower in the 1x and helped her back into her boat. The crew of the 4x stated that they could have been keeping a better lookout, in which case they could have stopped (or at least slowed) the boat before hitting the 1x.
- A 2x had just finished a 1k piece and was coming to a stop but was distracted listening to a loose backstay. A stable 1x was setting off from the landing stages. Both crews had a poor lookout and the bow of the 2x collided with the side of the 1x causing minor damage.
- A 4- was travelling downstream, cut a corner, and collided with a 2- travelling up stream. The steerer of the 4- thought that the 2- was travelling in the same direction as them and moved further into the centre of the river to overtake. The 2- was in correct position on the river. The crews were reminded to turn their body properly when looking around to steer.
- An 8+ was doing a piece around a bend, the tide was very low and both crews were toward the middle of the river. The cox was looking down at splits on their cox box and crashed another crew. There was damage to boats and blades.

Look both ways

It is not sufficient just to look over the right shoulder towards the centre of the waterway and not see what is between the boat and the bank, as these examples show: -

- In a collision between a 1x and a 2x, the 1x was on the correct side of the lake moving very slowly. The 2x was performing bursts at race pace travelling towards the single and moving in the same direction. The crew of the 2x looked over their right shoulder and saw no boats and continued with their planned bursts. While at full pace they collided with the single on their left side. Neither crew was aware of the other until the moment of collision. The 1x capsized and was rescued by a nearby coach in a launch. The single was towed back to the pontoon by the double. The damage was likely exacerbated by the lack of backstays on the 2x bow riggers. Both the bow rowers suffered lower back injuries.

- In another incident a 2- narrowly avoided colliding with a river cruiser. The steers commented that they should have "looked over the right shoulder as well as left especially when manoeuvring as described". This report is particularly amusingly written, an anonymised version is presented in Appendix 1 so that others can enjoy it.
- There was a collision between a 2x and a 4x which resulted in damage to the 4x (as shown). The 2x was turning at the end of a course. Steerers will be reminded to look over both shoulders before turning.
- A rower in a 1x was going out for a paddle and didn't look around in time before hitting the bow of the boat into a wall along the dock.

Waterborne diseases

There were six incidents that resulted in rowers suffering from waterborne diseases. These are summarised below: -

- Three experienced senior rowers were attempting difficult skills drills by the pontoon in 1xs. All three suffered profuse vomiting and stomach cramps, 24-36 hours later. They all received medical attention and extensive treatment for gastroenteritis and dehydration (due to their profuse vomiting). The rowers had to take time off training to recover from the illness. Nearby clubs were notified of the condition of the water.
- Two junior rowers in 1xs capsized in separate incidents, at Saturday morning training, They were close to the bank and were not injured. However, both scullers had the following Monday off school due to sickness. There have been reports that an upstream pipe had been seen discharging into the river.
- A 2x collided with a 4- and capsized. A member of the crew of the 2x swallowed some river water and a little time later became sick.
- There was concern about the coxes of bow loaders being splashed with river water. At one club two coxes have become ill with stomach bug symptoms and diarrhoea. One recovered within three days; the other was ill for longer. Both coxes spend a lot of time in bow-loaded fours and get splashed very often. It was suspected that the river water was contaminated with sewage.
- A cox who competed in a large head race became seriously ill and was treated in hospital.
- A rower recently had a confirmed and unpleasant bacterial infection (H. pylori) which is thought to have been caused by launch wash while the rower was sculling.

There are occasional references to drinking "Coke" (or other fizzy drinks) after ingestion of contaminated water as some people still think that this will provide some protection. It will not. This is a complete fallacy, a myth. Drinking "Coke", or anything else, will not help in any way.

Anonymised information on incidents involving waterborne diseases is being provided to a Research Scientist at the Environment Agency and to River Action.

Take care to ensure that safety boat drivers know what they are expected to do

A safety boat was not in an appropriate position to monitor the start area and start line at a competition. The driver was sitting away from the boat, on the pontoon in the shade, not wearing a lifejacket and away from the boat. A 1x experienced difficulties less than 50 metres from the start.

The umpires' launch went to help in anticipation that the safety launch would attend. The crew of the Umpires' launch proceeded to rescue the 1x as otherwise it would have run into danger. The safety launch did not arrive. The race continued unsupervised by an Umpire.

Please take care to ensure that your safety boat drivers are fully briefed and understand what is expected from them. Please also check that they do what they are expected to do.

It is all about learning

The following comment was made on an Incident Report: -

Thanks for the report.

The concepts of "fault" and "blame" are not helpful. In the event of an incident, it is best to consider what your crew could have done differently. According to the other linked report one crew was trying to steer round a bend when rowing at full speed. Perhaps the learning should be that this practice is unsafe.

Risk Training

There was a request for information on the British Rowing Risk Assessment training. The Risk Assessment training is in two phases. The first phase is called "Safety Basics - Understanding and Managing Risk". This can be found here. Level 2 Club Coaches are required to complete this as a prerequisite to their training.

The second phase is Advanced Risk Assessment, available here. In RowSafe sections 3.4, Club Rowing Safety Adviser Job Description and 4.4, Competition Rowing Safety Adviser Job Description there is an expectation that these Rowing Safety Advisers are expected to complete this training.

If there are problems with the links then open RowHow here, login and click on "Online Learning", there are links here to these and other training modules.

What to do if someone is not happy to go afloat

There was a question from someone who describes themselves as an "elderly cox" about who decides whether, or not, it is safe to go afloat. He thought that it should be the cox as "master" of the boat.

The response was that, in general, the cox is master of the boat and should take charge. There are sometimes issues with a young junior cox in a boat of more experienced rowers where they may be advised by a "senior rower". Coaches are trained and expected to assess the conditions before a boat goes afloat, also taking the capabilities of the crew into account, and come to a conclusion whether the outing should go ahead as planned, or the plan should be modified, or they should not go afloat.

There is a statement in the risk management plan document here that states: -

"Remember, before an outing can start, everyone involved (coach, crew, cox, parents, etc.) has to be satisfied that it is safe to proceed as planned (or with revised plans). It is better (and safer) to be on land wishing you were on the water than to be on the water wishing you were on land.

Also consider whether, even if it is safe, the crew will benefit from an outing in marginal conditions and whether less competitive rowers will be put off the sport by outings in unpleasant conditions. "

If **anyone** says that they do not want to go afloat, then they stay ashore. They should not be pressured in this decision by the coach or crew or anyone else. In the case of juniors then their parents may have an opinion that should be respected. The parents or carers can make this decision on behalf of the child.

It is important to take care not to put pressure on anyone who is not happy to take part in a planned activity. They may think that the activity is unsafe or beyond their capability. A little explanation or encouragement may be acceptable, but this should not go so far as to constitute pressure. People have the right to make their own decisions, and this should be respected. Parents and carers have this right in relation to their children.

Remember that the British Rowing Code of Conduct (here), contains the following in the section on Standards of Behaviour and Conduct in relation to Coaches, Instructors, Officials, Umpires and Volunteers : -

4.5 maintain an environment free of fear and harassment.

and

4.8 not force anyone to participate in the sport or place undue pressure on them.

and

4.18 recognise the rights of all Participants to be respected, treated as equals, with their dignity preserved.

Please take extra care of people who are nervous about taking part in a planned activity and respect their wishes. Take care also not to allow others to exert any pressure on them.

What happens when the tide turns on the Tideway

The navigation rules on the Tidal Thames (Tideway) change at each turn of the tide. There has been confusion and some incidents as this does not always happen at the expected times and does not happen at the same time at all points along the Tideway. The correct approach is specified on page 73 of the Tideway Code. This contains the following information: -

It is possible for a rowing boat to travel faster than the tidal stream is moving, so when travelling with the tidal stream rowing boats can easily overtake the changing tide.

When travelling against it, boats could easily meet the changing tidal stream as it approaches. At the point where the tide is turning there is an obvious zone of still water, known as slack water. This slack water zone continually moves at the head of the turning tide and is a good indicator that steers will need to change their navigation pattern from one tidal stream to the other. See page 12 for how to check the tidal stream direction. However if in doubt:

- *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*

The advice on page 12 includes the following: -

Apart from tide tables, which only give predicted tide times, there are several practical ways to check the tidal stream direction, although you must always allow for the strength and direction of the wind:

- *Look at boats moored only at one end, they will hang downstream from their mooring.*
- *See what direction floating objects drift in.*
- *Look at which direction the water is flowing past a bridge buttress or buoy.*

Support for Rowing in Ireland

A link to the publicly available British Rowing Man Overboard video (here) was provided to a RNLI Water Safety Officer in Northern Ireland. This adviser has been approached by a number of local Coastal Rowing Clubs about providing training for man overboard situations. As this is not something that the RNLI provides, the adviser was wondering if this could be addressed by what we offer.

I explained that advice to clubs in Ireland is normally provided by Rowing Ireland and copied the note to my colleague there. I also explained that we have a course on Man Overboard in the members only area of the website (in Row How here). This is not currently available.

Work with PaddleUK (formerly British Canoeing)

Incident Reports that refer Kayaks and Canoes were shared with a colleague at PaddleUK.

Rowing with Asthma

A parent wrote to ask for advice as their child has been rowing since last summer and has had an asthma attack recently at school. The parent said that "*the British rowing website clearly suggests rowing is possible for asthmatics, but I wondered what happens if an athlete has an asthma incident on the boat while on the water. Where can I find more information about this?*

The response was that there is advice on Asthma in Section 8.6.3 of RowSafe, here. This contains the following advice to rowers with asthma: -

8.6.3. Asthma

Asthma is common, affecting 5.4 million people or one in eight people in the UK. It is most common in children, but also affects about a quarter of all elite athletes. Asthma does result in 1,200 people dying per year, but if managed correctly asthma should not be a barrier to a normal life or participation in sport.

The diagnosis of asthma is usually made by the GP and treated with a variety of prescription inhalers – often a blue "reliever" and/or a brown "preventer". It is important to comply with the medication prescribed and to liaise with healthcare professionals if symptoms persist. It is important to remember that particularly for asthma, prevention is easier than cure.

and

Rowers with Asthma

Rowers with asthma are expected to:

- *Carry their relieving inhaler at all times.*
- *Take the prescribed inhaler just before exercise (although the initial effect is dilation of the bronchi this can last for three to four hours).*
- *Always carry the prescribed inhaler in the boat (or close by in the gym) so that symptoms can be treated without delay.*
- *Warm up and cool down carefully and effectively, especially in hot, dry dusty or 'asthma inducing ambient weather'.*
- *Minimise exercise with upper respiratory tract infections (such as colds and flu) as this will hasten the onset and make the asthma worse.*
- *Ensure that coaches and fellow rowers are aware of their condition and how best to manage it.*
- *Attend regular asthma reviews as advised by their GP.*
- *Check that their medication complies with UK Anti-Doping rules and follow the guidelines for applying for a Therapeutic Use Exemption if the dose schedule is exceeded*

There is further advice on the British Rowing website here Rowing with asthma - British Rowing Plus.

One of the things we must remember is that all people are individuals and can experience their medical conditions in different ways. Your child will become an expert on the management of their own condition.

In general, people with asthma should use their normal inhaler before exercise and carry their rescue inhaler so that it can be used if needed. This will help to prevent them from suffering an asthma episode.

Precautions rowers should take during the regattas at Henley

There was a request for information on the advice that should be provided on the prevention of waterborne illness to some rowers from the US arriving shortly. There is relevant advice on the British Rowing Sustainability page of the website here. There is a link to our Guidance on Rowing when water quality is poor; this can be found here. The current Storm Discharge maps (Event Duration Maps) are also available from this page. The map for Thames Water is here. These are kept up to date. At that time there were no discharges near Henley.

Sewage advice

There was a request for advice from a school in relation to contaminated water. It was stated that on that day there was an overwhelming smell of sewage by the river - is it safe for the children to row? They're not falling in, but just wanted to check.

The response referred to the British Rowing advice mentioned above and added that personal hygiene after being splashed with river water is an important part of the preventative strategy. So, taking a shower, or at least washing hands and face will lower ingestion rates, plus washing down boats and oars will also lower the spread of infection.

his is in addition to skin, blister, cuts and graze care.

Observe proper hand hygiene (with or without blisters) – infection is just as likely in everyday life; don't always blame river water

1. Cover blisters, cuts and grazes and treat them so that they heal and do not become infected
2. If the blisters are red or weeping, do not row until they have healed
3. If you have blisters make sure that you wash the handle of any blade you have rowed with so as not to pass on infection

Blister Advice

There was a request for information from a nurse working at a boarding school who is seeing an increase in the amount of rowing blisters. Do we have any up to date information about treatment and what advice we should be giving the boys.

The response was there is relevant information on the Athlete Health page of the website at Rowing hand care: blister tips - British Rowing. Please do not forget the importance of hand hygiene.

Epilepsy Advice

There was a request for advice from a rower who had been seizure free for just over two years until they had a further seizure. Their club had told the rower that they would not be allowed on the water for a year. This rower experiences a warning a couple of minutes prior to an episode but more importantly they tend to know something is not right the day before. They have never lost consciousness or been injured as a result of a seizure.

The response was that it may help your club to understand the following: -

- Epilepsy is a syndrome rather than a monolithic disease; it affects different people in different ways
- Everyone is an individual and each person responds differently
- People with chronic disorders tend to become experts in their individual condition
- The British Rowing Medical Panel guidance on Epilepsy has been updated

The revised Medical Guidance can be found here Rowing and Epilepsy - British Rowing. This contains a wealth of useful information.

Please discuss the timing of your return to rowing with your consultant. If they have no experience of rowing then you may need to explain the level of exertion that rowers experience (although, in your case this may not be relevant) and the extra risks that being afloat can have in the event of you having an episode.

Launch weight distribution and engine trim

It is not unusual to see launches with their bows so high out of the water that the driver's view ahead is restricted. This is dangerous. It is particularly a problem with tiller steered lightweight launches with a crew of one person.

Having two people in the launch will help providing they use their body weight to achieve better weight distribution. Normally, the person who is not driving should be positioned in the bows.

Having more than one person in the launch also helps as then one can focus on coaching while the other concentrates on driving the launch safely. It will help too if there is a need to rescue someone.

If there is only one person in the launch then it is possible to improve weight distribution, to some extent, by fixing weights in the bows.

Adjusting the outboard motor trim can also help to improve the for and aft attitude of the boat. There is no simple solution here because the angle of the transom can vary considerably from one boat design to another.

There is useful information and here and here. As a simple guide moving the pin towards the transom tends to lift the stern and lower the bows but do not overdo it as this can also reduce the boat speed.

Appendix 1

The Incident in which a 2- did not collide with a river cruiser.

Brief description of the incident: While returning from the lock, masters pair travelling upstream were rather pleased to have remembered a fallen tree that was blocking 25% of the river. Having seen it perhaps 20 minutes previously, there was no guarantee that this mental imprint would have stuck in their aging brains.

But it had! Hurrah. Must be the beneficial effects of exercise on the brain as well as body. I really do recommend it.

To navigate around the sadly fallen ent, this required the pair to be expertly steered onto the wrong side of the river so as to avoid the obstacle. Given the usual standard of steering precision normally shown by this author, this was a triumph.

On passing the tree and before being able to return to the correct water, a loud hooter signalled the approaching presence of a river cruiser steaming quickly downstream to not pick up any passengers as usual.

Taking avoiding action by holding up hard at bow and pulling round at stroke, a collision was averted, which was good as it would have spoiled an otherwise good trip in "the gentlemen's chariot of choice".

Blushing mildly (though this may have been the effort or possibly last night's wine) we apologised to the skipper and crew who took it well. Probably pleased not to have to fill whatever forms they have when running down a smaller craft.

Measures taken: Had a good word with myself to look over the right shoulder as well as left especially when manoeuvring as described.

(If you are confused by the word "ent" then check Lord of the Rings.)