



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

June 2024

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Rowing coaches save a life

Rowers reported seeing a young woman in the water when they were warming up for a session. They said she didn't look to be in a good state so raised it to their coach's attention immediately. Two coaches searched for the woman. They found a bag and set of headphones on the bank, so called the Emergency Services. They heard a cough and located the woman and tried to keep her talking and with her head above water until the fire brigade arrived and retrieved her from the water. It is understood that the woman was attempting to commit suicide.

It is 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 June

Keep an eye on what the children are up to

In one incident, the junior rowers were training in the gym, supervised by three adults, because the wind was too strong for them to go afloat. There were three groups of children (non-rowers) outside the club. Two groups located at the top of the ramp to the pontoon, a third sitting on the grass. There was a coach outside the club and the children approached the club. The coach called the Police but some of the children went away so the coach notified the Police that they were not needed. Sometime later, a group of children returned, and their tone was more aggressive. By this time the coach was accompanied by a parent and a dog. One of the children climbed up the railings onto the balcony. Other parents emerged from the building and around 7 or 8 children, including two girls, emerged from the car park. The adults were subjected to foul language and the children threatened the dog. The Police were called again and attended. The Police advice was to call them early and not to engage in any conversation with the children.

In another incident Liquid was thrown from a bridge onto four rowers. No harm was caused to the crew. The event was witnessed by another crew who reported that a group of young people dropped the liquid and then ran away.

In yet another incident, a group of three new starters were on the water with two coaches. A group of children on the bank were throwing stones at the rowers. The rowers moved away to the opposite bank, contrary to the rules of the river, but out of range of the projectiles.

In a further incident a Masters 1x, two 2xs and the coaching launch with one occupant were passing the Tidal Barrier. A group of four or five youths on mountain bikes began throwing stones down from the parapet of the viewing area to hit the passing boats. A 1x was struck on the stern canvas and the coaching launch was hit twice, one stone striking the thwart just half a metre behind the driver's head. This is not the first time that this has happened, and it is feared that this will become a regular 'game' again for the local school children this summer. The incident has been reported to the Police. Video cameras will be carried on future outings.

This problem may become worse as the summer progresses, particularly in the summer holidays, especially if the weather is hot. There is some advice on how to deal with incidents like these in Appendix I.

Keep a good lookout

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

- A novice in a 1x steered into an overgrown tree. The rower was reminded to keep a good look out behind him and to keep calm when in a difficult scenario.
- During a full pressure piece, the bow steers of a 4x failed to see a large tree that had travelled downriver and was snagged on a shallower part of the river. The collision stopped the boat and the boat turned so the bow was facing downstream. This lifted the bow rower out of their shoes and off their seat onto the slide bed.
- An 8+ ran into end of a pontoon when coming ashore after a race. Nobody was injured but the boat was damaged.



- A Junior 8+ collided with an unmanned, partly submerged upturned dinghy floating down the river. The underside of the dinghy was black and would have been difficult to see. The fin and propellor of the dinghy caused considerable damage to the bow section of the 8+ and the boat will probably be written off. All crew members are thankfully unharmed, although highly shaken.

Keep a good lookout for swimmers

An experienced junior sculler in a 1x was rowing along around a corner with several others. They were all keeping a good look out all around. The sculler heard a large bang from his bows and did an emergency stop, looked around and saw a person's head pop up out of the water. The swimmer looked shocked but was talking and saying everything was fine and apologising for swimming near the boat. The rower was upset and shocked at what had happened but was physically fine.

In another incident a rower in a 1x was rowing at low speed and carefully navigating amongst a large number of swimmers who appeared to be paying no attention to river traffic. A swimmer jumped into the water in front of the rower. Part of a rigger hit the swimmer at very low speed. Both rower and swimmer were unharmed, and the outing continued.

In a further incident, rowers in a 2- spotted swimmers in the river. They were swimming on the correct side but did not have a float or hi Viz hats so were not easily visible. The rowers only saw the swimmers after they had passed them. The rowers spoke to the swimmers and explained that people row at different times of the day and a coxless boat would not necessarily see them until it's too late. They have also warned other rowers to be aware of swimmers.

Please take care to keep a particularly good look out, throughout the summer, in areas and at times when swimmers may be present.

Take care of your trailer

Whilst towing back from a competition, the rear nearside tyre on a trailer suffered a total failure on a motorway.

The incident occurred close to a junction, so the driver was able to leave the motorway onto the hard shoulder of the slip road in a safe and controlled manner.

The trailer had been serviced in January 2024, with no issues noted with the tyre, and the tyre itself was quite new, leading to the assumption that the incident was caused by a foreign object either at the scene, or previously in the journey.



The damaged mud guard and wheel were removed by the driver, and the spare wheel fitted so that the journey could be completed.

The lightweight warning triangle kept getting blown over, a warning triangle was essential as the trailer stopped on a slight bend. The incident highlighted the lack of key equipment in the towing vehicle, the following will be provided: -

- A Hi Vis waistcoat for each occupant of the vehicle.
- A method of lifting the trailer to remove and replace wheels.
- A torch in case of the incident happening in darkness.
- A more robust warning triangle, which stays in place.

Please take care of your trailer and carry the kit that you may need.

Do not improvise with kill cords

A launch had been fitted with a customised kill-cord connector, which did not have the usual red cable attached to it. It appears to have been carefully made to hold another key, but it was not possible to connect it to the launch driver. The reported concerns were that: -

- someone has taken the trouble to modify an existing kill-cord in a way that makes it unusable for its primary purpose and
- this launch may have been operating in this unsafe condition during normal training sessions etc.

It is understood that subsequently a proper kill-cord has been obtained for this launch.

Shouted Warnings

In one report there was a comment that the other crew involved in the collision, and their bank party, did not provide a shouted warning. Shouted warnings can be very helpful in situations where there is a risk of collision but please do not rely on them. It is still necessary to keep a good lookout and navigate at a reasonable speed for the conditions.

Common faults found when checking boats

These are the common faults reported recently using the Incident Reporting system: -

- heel restraint issues
- heel restraint and hatch cover issues
- more heel restraint issues. In this case it was explained that *“The crew concerned have been reminded that any defects and breakages should be reported immediately for repair as this is the club’s policy! All boats in the fleet have been rechecked to make sure there are no other faults.”*
- a cox was wearing a lifejacket so loose that they could lift it over their head. The cox was asked to talk to their coach and returned with a correctly fitting lifejacket.
- one shoe had a heel restraint that was too long; this was the second occasion this boat had been checked, the first time the heel had not been restrained at all.
- the shoes did not have an easily accessible strap to open the shoes
- loose heel restraints were found on an 8+ presented, this was fixed prior to boating
- the heel restraints of 41 boats were checked; three heel restraints were missing from one boat.
- heel restraints were found to be missing on bow seat of a 4x-

Please learn from these reports and ensure that heel restraints, etc. are checked prior to every outing.

Waterborne diseases

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

- A rower was on the water in the evening on Thursday 13 June and felt a bit ill the next day. On Saturday 15 June, in the morning the rower vomited and collapsed; doctors suspect an e coli infection
- A rower suffered routine splashing and washed thoroughly after boating. The rower suffered severe diarrhoea for three days following the outing.

Take care when lifting boats

A rower fell from purpose-built steps when lifting a boat onto a high rack. The rower was taken to A&E and was diagnosed as having a broken ulna; they will not be able to row for up to 3 months. The club will review its risk assessment and identify a better system for lifting boats onto high racks.

Rowers to the rescue again

A member of the public slipped down the bank 50 yards from the rowing club sustaining gravel grazes to her face and hand, and a family member came to the club to ask for assistance.

A club first aider and two other members went to assist. There was grit and lacerations on the lady's face and hand. Gauze and saline from the first aid kit were used, but the lady had to be walked back to the club so she could wash the grit off her face and hand.

Please always be prepared to provide aid to others when they need it.

Take care around pleasure boats

An 8+ was rowing at low rate and steady state pressure. A large pleasure craft was proceeding towards the crew and moved to port onto the incorrect side of the river around 500m ahead of the crew.

The pleasure craft continued towards the 8+ with the cox of the 8+ aware and proceeding with caution.

Around 200m away from the 8+, the pleasure craft turned and began to head to starboard, back to the correct side of the river. It then however abruptly turned back to port and was on a collision course with the 8+. The cox of the 8+ proceeded to hold hard and stop the boat.

A collision was avoided with about 50m between boats.

The pleasure craft proceeded to crash into the wall on the port side of the river and stop. The 8+ then went around the stopped boat and continued the session.

Take extra care to protect and support junior rowers

A junior 2x was approaching a bridge when a Narrowboat came through the bridge going in the opposite direction. The boats were on a collision course. The 2x did an emergency stop. The Steerer of the narrowboat proceeded to shout and swear at the junior crew causing them to become upset.

A group of junior rowers (two 4x+s, two 2xs & one 1x) was rowing downstream ahead of the coaching launch and had just gone around a bend. There was a motorboat, that was also going downstream, just in front of the group. The motorboat did a 180 degree turn and started coming upstream on same side as the group of rowers. The rowers explained to the driver that he should be on the other side of the river at which he started swearing at them. The group had to stop quickly to avoid a collision. The motorboat came past the coaching launch still on wrong side. The cox was upset, and crew were a little shaken.

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for rowers to be exposed to verbal abuse even if doing so is inexcusable. In areas where this can happen, coaches should take extra care to stay close to their rowers to provide support where this is needed. Please consider how many coaches are needed to escort a group of young rowers. Having one launch may not always be sufficient.

Look after your Launches

Two launches that were not in use were stored outside. There was an attempt to steal them, and they were manhandled to the river and paddled away. This was noticed by a club member on their way to Club. The club member challenged the thieves, and the launches were abandoned by the riverbank. Both launches are now chained to fixed objects and each other.

Report serious incidents to the navigation authority

A 4x was overtaken by a large commercial speedboat that did not reduce speed. The speedboat turned in front of the 4x and came past the rowers again. This generated a wash about four feet high that swamped the boat. The crew were wet but uninjured. This incident was subsequently reported to the Navigation Authority who replied that the speedboat did conduct a high-speed U-turn in the vicinity of the rower which is likely to have caused significant wash. This was the master's first offence he has been given "educational advice."

Training for Coxes

There was an enquiry about the location of the coxes/steersperson course as this still does not appear to be available on the British Rowing website. The response was that it is not currently available. However, there is a Classic Rowing Coxing Workshop that you can find at <https://www.rowhow.org/course/view.php?id=102> on RowHow. You will need to be a British Rowing member to access this. It is intended for clubs to deliver to members but will have a lot of the same information as the previous training.

Work with PaddleUK (formerly British Canoeing)

Incident Reports that refer Kayaks and Canoes were shared with a colleague at PaddleUK (formerly British Canoeing).

An incident involving a collision between a rowing boat and a Stand-Up Paddleboard in which paddleboarders were injured was reported to PaddleUK. This has been used to create a British Rowing Incident Report.

Thunder and Lightning

Thunder and Lightning interrupted the British Rowing Masters Championship and the "30:30" Rule was invoked. This simply states: -

If the flash to bang time is 30 seconds, or less, then find shelter. Stay there until 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder.

There is a reference to this in Section 9.1 of [RowSafe](#) and in the [Safety Alert on Lighting](#).

Reports of Illness due to Contaminated Water

There was recently a British Rowing webinar on the clean water initiatives; this was hosted with our Clean Water Partners - The Rivers Trust and River Action - there is a recording at <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/3866415486551368450>.

The Riveraction website can be found here [Home - River Action UK](#).

The Water Quality page on the Sustainability part of the website has been updated to include more pollution maps. These can be found here [Sustainability - British Rowing](#). This part of the website also contains [Guidance-for-Rowing-When-Water-Quality-is-Poor-March-2024.pdf \(britishrowing.org\)](#).

There was a suggestion that the greater number of reports of illness could be caused by greater awareness of the problem. The response was that there are several things happening simultaneously and these are difficult to untangle. It may be that there is a greater awareness of water contamination, and this leads to an increased number of incidents being reported. However, the objective measures of water pollution confirm that our rivers are more polluted than they have been, at least in recent years.

The discharge of untreated sewage during times of high rainfall has had a significant effect on river water quality and we had high rainfall in the early part of this year. It is this that has increased the number of people experiencing illness.

Not all incidents are reported, although many are. There are about 2,500 reports each year. Some incidents due to exposure to contaminated water may not be reported. Knowledge that there are some reports, as summarised in the Monthly Report, may prompt others to report their own issues.

This whole issue is a mess that is not sustainable. It poses a threat to the future of rowing and other sports in and on the water. It does not do any favours to public health generally. My colleagues, Riveraction and others are doing a brilliant job to raise awareness and prompt improvement.

Appendix I – How to deal with difficult situations

The following guidance contains advice is from a colleague in British Rowing who has Police experience.

- Stay calm
- Try not to be isolated, have other adults present if possible.
- Avoid engaging with the people that you are concerned about
- Avoid any form of confrontation.
- At the first sign of trouble, call the Police and tell them your location and the nature of the problem.
- The age of criminal responsibility is 10 years old. No action being taken against anyone younger than that, although it is possible that their parents will be informed.
- Estimate the ages of the people involved.
- Observe the behaviour and characteristics of the people involved. A good way to record encounters is to use a mnemonic called ADVOKATE.

A	Amount or length of time the witness had the suspect under observation
D	Distance between the witness and the suspect during the observation
V	Visibility conditions during the observation
O	Obstructions to the observations – whether they temporarily or partially inhibited the observation
K	Whether the suspect is known to the witness in any way
A	Any particular reason the witness has for remembering the suspect or event
T	Time the witness had the suspect under observation and the amount of time elapsed since the event
E	Errors in the description provided by the witness compared with the actual appearance

There is a need to differentiate between any information given to the Police and that included in British Rowing Incident Reports. The Police will be interested in what happened and the identities of the people involved.

British Rowing Incident Reports should focus on what can be learned from the incident. Please do not to include names, particularly those of Juniors, in any Incident Reports.