



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

August 2024

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents in August

Rowers to the rescue again

Three experienced scullers from Coastal Barbarians Rowing Club were on a training outing in C1xs going around Studland Bay. They saw a paddleboarder a few hundred metres beyond Old Harry Rocks, being blown or drifting out to sea. One sculler stayed near the cliffs in safe waters, the other two rowed out to the paddleboarder to see if they were OK. The paddleboarder was unable to get back on the paddleboard in the choppy waters. The paddleboarder was OK, they were quite calm, relieved to have been seen.

It was too rough to go alongside the paddle board and attach a towline. This could have resulted in injury to the paddleboarder and increase risk of the scullers capsizing.

A sightseeing cruise boat was in the vicinity heading towards the scullers. The scullers waved at the boat, and it approached. The skipper understood the situation, and the scullers asked for coast guard emergency assistance. The skipper immediately radioed for help.

The scullers stayed with the paddleboarder to provide reassurance that help was on the way. The cruise boat also remained nearby. They were all drifting out to sea. Within about five minutes a local diving boat came to assist, recovered the paddleboarder and paddleboard and went into Knoll Beach. The scullers rowed back to Old Harry and then back to the beach to end the outing.

Coastal Barbarians Rowing Club is being sent a British Rowing Certificate of Commendation stating that:-

“Members of the club worked together and with others to rescue a paddleboarder in distress in the sea off Old Harry Rocks, Langstone Bay on 10th August 2024.”

Look both ways

There were several collisions or near collisions due to rowers looking to one side only. Here are some examples.

A rower in a 1x was on the correct side of the waterway at paddling pace and was looking ahead to one side every 3-5 strokes. When they checked the other shoulder, they saw a 4x was fast approaching. The collision caused the rower in the 1x to capsize.

In another incident, a 4- was rowing at a low rating technical with the steers looking over left shoulder frequently. A 2x was going in the opposite direction. The crews noticed each other when they were about a length apart and stopped. The hulls did not collide but bow of the 4- was struck lightly by a blade.

In yet another incident a 2- was doing a practice start. The steers person looked over their left shoulder but didn't see the small cruiser over the right shoulder till too late. A blade hit the cruiser, a gate was detached, and the boat capsized.

In another incident a 2- hit a mooring pontoon at the end of island, the steers hadn't spotted it as they were looking over the other shoulder without catching it in their peripheral vision.

Do not go afloat in a boat with faults

A rower was launching their a 1x for a race. The assisting Boat Marshal noted that the rigger didn't seem secure, the rower was not concerned. The rower rowed to the holding area where they were asked to back down. The rower took one stroke and capsized. Their rigger had become loose or detached. The Rower's head was underwater for about 10-15 seconds, they managed to get their head above water but was "coughing and spluttering and was agitated". The rower was unable to release their feet possibly because the detached rigger made the boat too unstable. It was also thought that the quick release mechanism was not secure.

A Boat Marshal jumped into the water and swam to the rower, and the Safety Launch and Paramedics were called. The Boat Marshal supported Rower's head above the water. The rower was assisted into the Safety Launch and taken to the bank side where Paramedics were waiting. The Paramedics noted that Rower was cold, pale and shaken, "uncertain about themselves", but was aware of who and where they were.

The Safety Launch crew noted that the surface of Rower's boat where the rigger should have sat was "pulled" and that one of the four fastenings was loose or detached.

In another incident, whilst rowing, a quick release wing rigger of a 2- came free on one side, causing a capsize. The rowers were able to swim the boat to safety and inspect it. The rigger fixing was damaged and the boat was recovered to the boathouse by a launch.

Please take care to ensure that your boats are in good and safe condition **before** launching.

Act early to prevent incidents

The crew of a 4x saw a 1x approaching on the incorrect side of the water from under a bridge so they called out twice but 1x did not respond. The 4x then held hard to avoid a more serious collision. There was a collision and the 1x capsized. Please take immediate action if you notice that hazardous circumstances are developing. It is not sufficient simply to warn the other crew.

Keep the boat racking area tidy

A rower tripped over building supplies left next to the boat racking while carrying a stable double with another rower. They nearly dropped the boat, and the rower injured their hand and arm catching it awkwardly. The rower suffered pain, swelling and reduced mobility in their hand and bruising and small cut on forearm. There was no damage to the boat.

Carry a bailer with you

If you row at a venue that is prone to considerable wash from inconsiderate drivers of motor vessels then it may help to carry a bailer or a sponge. In one incident a rower in a 1x decided to turn side on to the wash which, although making them very unstable (which they felt they were competent to manage), did limit the amount of water that came into the boat. They had suffered a similar incident in a 2x just over a week previously and had started carrying a cup for bailing. They used this to remove some of the water, so this became a minor disruption.

Rowers need fuel too

A junior rower raced in a 4x and then a 2x in back-to-back races. On approaching the landing stage after the 2x race, they indicated they were going to faint. They were assisted out of the boat and seated on land, and they did faint. A Doctor (a Regatta attendee) was at the location and immediately attended and the Regatta Paramedics were called. The rower recovered, but complained of chest pains and was hyperventilating "to the extreme". After 20-25 minutes, when they had not succeeded in calming the Rower sufficiently to be able to walk them to the First Aid tent, the attending medical staff decided to call an Ambulance. After around 30 minutes the rower could be discharged into their parent's care. The rower's crewmates, and parent, advised that Rower had previously fainted often and had not eaten since an early breakfast, some 5-6 hours previously. The weather was sunny, warm and relatively humid.

Please take to ensure that your rowers have eaten and hydrated sufficiently.

Take care in the gym too

While moving indoor rowing machines in the training area, a heavy audio speaker was knocked off the wall and fell onto a junior rower, injuring their wrist. An ice pack was applied immediately, and one of the parents was present and able to take the rower home safely. Juniors will be shown again how to safely move an indoor rowing machine, and the speaker will be fixed more securely to the wall. Please take care to ensure that all juniors are supervised by a responsible adult at all times when at the club.

Take care to quarantine boats that have faults

During an outing in a 1x, one side of the rigger sheared off. The rower managed to not fall in and waited for about five minutes for other scullers to approach. They arranged for the club launch to assist the rower. Following the incident the rower learned that the weakness in this section of the rigger had been reported in February but hadn't been communicated to the wider club. Please take care to mark and quarantine any boats that have faults.



The other learning point was to carry a mobile phone in a waterproof case.

Keep an eye on your drain plug

A launch capsized and three people were in the water. Coaches from a neighbouring club quickly re-launched one of their safety boats and rescued this crew and their boat. It was subsequently found that the cord on the drain plug of the launch was accidentally pulled out and nobody noticed. The launch slowly filled with water, became unstable, and capsized.

Antisocial behaviour again

Stones thrown in the direction of a 4+ by people on the bank under tree cover and not visible. The stones did not hit the boat or crew. The crew moved away from the area.

In another incident at a different club, Group of youths threw stones at junior beginner rower in a 1x from banks of waterway. The sculler steered to avoid the stones and ran into the reed bank, then capsized when lost they control of their blades. Youths then laughed at the rower and threw stones at the other crews and verbally abused the crews and their adult supervisors/coaches. With aid of adult supervisors, the Sculler managed to get back in the boat and rowed the boat back immediately to the club accompanied by an adult supervisor. Once back at the club the club protocol to shower and change and offer of a hot drink was given. This incident reinforces the need for the club's policy of having two adult supervisors accompanying junior inexperienced rowers and the use of radios to call for aid from the other junior coaches.

In yet another incident a rower in a 1x was regularly looking ahead but suddenly found that a motorboat was heading straight for their head. The rower swerved and the bow of the narrow boat hit the loom of their oar, almost causing them to capsize. The two young men steering at the stern laughed at the rower and videoed them with their phone. They appeared to be drunk or under the influence of drugs. This incident has been reported to the Police.

In another incident a 2x passed under a footbridge when an orange liquid was thrown from the bridge. Some of the liquid hit the stern canvas of the boat. The perpetrators were seen scurrying off the bridge, concealing themselves below the railings. Shortly afterwards the crew passed two PCSOs who were on a bench by the towpath. They informed them of the incident and the PCSOs went to investigate. On return to the boat house the boat was cleaned thoroughly.

In a further incident a large group of adolescent males stole an inflatable dinghy from the sports centre. The group of males were paddling this around the dock. When club members on the launches noticed this, they went to collect the boat from the males. Upon trying to retrieve the boat rocks and bags of rubbish were thrown at the club members on the launch, none of which hit them. Police were called who retrieved the inflatable dinghy and the young males dispersed from the docks.

Take extra care with inexperienced crews

An experienced rower was coxing a 4x+ and his boat approached a landing stage too fast and hit it. The cox identified the following: -

- Do not underestimate the run that developing rowers can achieve on a boat.
- Do not assume that novice rowers (or people in general) will understand things with only a verbal explanation; give them the opportunity to practise.
- Avoid putting novice crews in situations where they need to make extreme movements in order to avoid collision (i.e., learn to land with only having to hold it up normally).

Please take care to learn from the experience of others.

Take notice of race marshalls

Just after the last race between WJ13 1xs, a 2x rowed back towards the boathouse on the wrong side of the waterway. They rowed without looking ahead and went straight at the two WJ13 scullers who had just finished racing. The crew of the 2x was told repeatedly to hold it up. The stroke person did, so they could clearly hear the Marshall's instructions, but the person in bow ignored it, kept rowing and shouted aggressively. They forced the two WJ13 scullers to split both ways, with one of them then being forced into the middle of the waterway where other crews were returning.

Not only was it a deliberately unsafe manoeuvre it must also have been very upsetting for the two young rowers who were presumably just starting their rowing careers. Please obey the instructions of marshalls, they are there to ensure your safety.

Take care with the weight distribution in your launches

A coach had positioned themselves in the stern of a launch alongside the fuel tank. The launch accelerated and turned. The launch hit its own wash which filled the back corner and capsized the launch. The kill cord stopped the engine instantly and the coach's lifejacket auto inflated.

A second launch arrived on the scene and coach was retrieved from the upturned launch. The RNLI was called and took the launch back to the rowing club. The club investigated, shared the lessons learned with other coaches and issued the coach involved with a written warning.

If your coaches operate in a launch alone then please ensure that they take care to ensure that they have the correct weight distribution in the launch. This may require them to have a weight strapped into the front of the launch. It is much better to operate with more than one person then the crew can move to balance the launch.

How to recover a rowing boat using a launch

There has been some interest in the best means of recovering a rowing boat once the crew has been rescued and is in a place of safety. I asked the RNLI for advice as they have greater knowledge and experience of this matter.

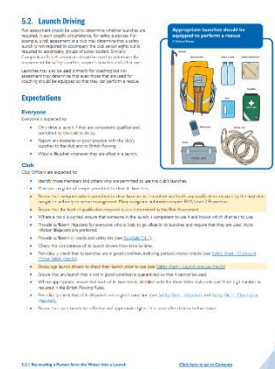
Their response was that: -

“Any rowing boat we need to recover is treated very delicately and in slow time. As a matter of course, the crew are always recovered before we address the boat. A water-logged boat needs to be emptied – either by tipping it over or by use of our salvage pumps. Only then would we be in a position to put the rowing boat on our sponson (as opposed to towing, which, given the fragility of the boat, would not be our preferred method).

However, should you need to tow, I would recommend an alongside tow, where the casualty boat is placed (empty of crew and water) alongside the rescue launch and tied appropriately.”

In most cases coaching launches can only carry small boats (1xs) across the boat, however, this probably accounts for most of our boat recoveries. Assisting a rower in a 1x back into their boat can be a good option but please take care to consider the condition of the rower and any damage to their boat. If the rower needs to be in a place of safety, and warmth, then please take them there. The boat can wait.

Beware of old versions of RowSafe



Someone wrote quoting the 2008 version of RowSafe. This is obsolete. RowSafe was revised in 2016 and has been updated every year since. If you find something that looks like the example to the right, then please ignore it. Unfortunately, try as we may, it has not proved possible to remove this from our website and there may still be copies in other people's websites.



The current version can always be found by following the link here [RowSafe - British Rowing](#). If you find something looking like the example on the left, then you should have found the up to date

version.

Feedback on Risk Management Plan for Antisocial Behaviour

Last month I included this draft Risk Management Plan. This is intended for inclusion in RowSafe 2025. Thank you to those of you who provided comments. If you did not then it is not too late, please feel free to write to me at safety@britishrowing.org.

Support for Paddle UK

Information on incidents involving canoes and paddleboards continues to be shared with my colleague at Paddle UK (formerly British Canoeing).

[This report contains safety guidance. Please read our safety message and disclaimer.](#)

Lifejackets

I was asked whether British Rowing whether British Rowing recommend a particular lifejacket. The response was that: -

We do not recommend any particular products. As a general rule, British Rowing does not endorse products.

The RNLI has published guidance on Lifejackets on its website here [Lifejackets And Buoyancy Aids - Choose And Maintain Yours \(rnli.org\)](#). This contains the following: -

All new lifejackets sold in the UK, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere in Europe are required to meet the International Standards Organisation standard ISO 12402. Older lifejackets may carry the CE mark. This is numbered from EN393 to EN399, depending on the amount of buoyancy provided.

Lifejackets all tend to take a similar shape once inflated. However, they are available in different shapes when packed. It helps if lifejackets for rowers are wide and flat and fit relatively high on the chest so that the rowers will not catch their thumbs in the lifejacket when rowing or sculling. This is less important for lifejackets for coxes and for people in launches.

There is guidance on the need for rowers to wear lifejackets in section 3.6 of RowSafe [RowSafe - British Rowing](#). This contains the following: -

" It is important that rowers who find themselves in the water do not panic and are able to respond so that they can keep themselves safe. In effect, this means that they should be able to swim or float. Floating, rather than swimming, is recommended by the RNLI, RLSS and NWSF because it tends to conserve heat and energy when in cold water.

All participants in rowing should be competent and confident in the water. Each club is expected to use its Risk Assessment to determine the capability that it requires its members to have.

It should be recognised that the ability to swim in a pool does not guarantee the ability to swim in cold, exposed waters. This is explained further in the online learning module on Cold Water and Hypothermia and the Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills.

Everyone taking part in rowing should be able to:

- Float unaided for at least five minutes*

And ideally

- Swim at least 50 metres in light clothing (rowing kit).*
- Tread water for at least two minutes.*
- Swim under water for at least five metres.*

Those rowers who can only float or swim when wearing a buoyancy aid should also wear such an aid, or a lifejacket if coxing, whenever they are afloat."

In most cases auto-inflation lifejackets are preferred but manual inflation lifejackets should be worn by coxes in bow-loaded boats. If you have a mix of lifejacket types, then it may help members to distinguish between them if each type is in a different colour.

Kill-cords

Kill-cords are used to stop launch engines if the driver falls overboard or moves far away from the engine. One end attached to the driver and the other end is attached to the engine or control unit. There is more information, and an interesting video, here [Kill cords \(rya.org.uk\)](http://rya.org.uk).

Some people find it convenient to clip the boat ignition key to the engine end of the kill-cord. Please do not do this.

If you fall out of the boat, then the kill cord will not detach from the control unit or engine and will not stop the engine. Please take care.