



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Another Tragic Incident at a Weir

The details of this incident are yet to be revealed and some of the details may change with greater knowledge and understanding. The current understanding is summarised below.

Even though the 4- had a very experienced crew, such was the unusual force of water through this weir that the 4- was drawn towards it, where the force of the water capsized the boat expelling the crew. The crew managed to hold onto the protective ropes on the upstream side of the weir, but due to the force of the water and the amount of time they were in this position, one of the crew members could not hold on, was swept over the weir and did not survive.

The coach, in a launch, tried to rescue the rowers but the launch took on water and the coach was swept with it over the weir, and was subsequently rescued.

A member of the public in a Dory attempted to rescue the rowers but the flow caused the boat to be pushed onto the weir. However, with the boat lodged against the weir it diverted the flow and reduced the force of the stream on the rowers. The lock keeper closed the gates. A local resident was then able to use their boat to rescue the people in the water.

There are four weirs on this stretch of water, all taking water from the side of the main reach to enable it to flow round the locks. The gates of the two upstream weirs were fully closed and the gates of this weir were fully open such that the flow over this weir was much greater than normal.

Prior to the incident, the crew had rowed past the weir on the far (right hand) side of the river. Once they were well clear of the weir they turned to paddle back to the club. The incident occurred as they were paddling back to the club on the side of the river closest to the weir.

At the time the river was on “red boards”, but the club had used its risk assessment to define circumstances in which it permits some of its members to row in these conditions. The criteria are based on the actual published flow rate of the river, the height of the river and the Environment Agency declared river state. It also takes into account the capacity and competence of the rowers, the wind speed and other weather conditions.

It is understood that other clubs in the area operate similar rules to permit some of their members to row on red boards in specified conditions. There have been Incident Reports of some crews going afloat in contravention of their club rules.

The river has been on red boards for a considerable proportion of the time in recent months due to the high rainfall. Rowers find it extremely frustrating not to be able to go afloat.

Interim Recommendations

Clubs should respect the EA/PLA guidance. In exceptional circumstances they may choose not to follow this guidance. In these circumstances they should consider the following recommendations.

These recommendations are made pending the exact circumstances of this tragic event being revealed, they are applicable at all clubs that have their own rules that permit some crews to go afloat on red boards.

1. Clubs should reconsider their rules for going afloat and make them more restrictive, this can include: -
 - a. Defining parts of the river that can be used and those that cannot so as to avoid rowing close to hazards such as weirs, bridges and moorings.
 - b. Reducing the thresholds of flow rate, etc.
 - c. Raising the competence and capacity requirements of rowers.
2. Clubs should ensure that its rules on going afloat are always followed and never disobeyed.
3. Clubs should look for alternative locations where they can row when flow rates on the river are high.

There is further information on the dynamics of flow over weirs on the British Rowing website at [Stay Away from Weirs and Sluices - British Rowing](#).

Other Incidents in October

Avoiding an emergency response

A rower in a 1x capsized on a river in town centre and was recovered by a coach in a launch and taken back to their boathouse. The sculling boat was left inverted and floating so that it could be recovered later. It is always correct to prioritise the rescue of a person over the recovery of equipment.

A member of the public noticed the inverted boat and notified the emergency services and there was a significant Ambulance and Fire Brigade response. It is reassuring to note the level of response and the vigilance of members of the public.

However, this level of response has a cost both in terms of finance and the non-availability of these resources to provide aid elsewhere. For that reason, it is recommended that in similar circumstances the emergency services should be notified that a boat has been left unattended for later recovery. Do this by phoning the Emergency Control room (999). Coaches and launch drivers should always carry mobile phones.

That's the way to do it

A junior 4+ was pushed close to a bridge support and pulled on the blades on one side and capsized. The cox was assisted from the bow loader coxes seat. The cox then correctly deployed their lifejacket. All of crew climbed on top of the upturned hull and received a throwline to be towed to a nearby dock. They went ashore and ran 100m back to the club. The rest of the Junior squad then righted the 4+ and rowed it back to the club.

Incident on a tow path

A coach was on a bike on the tow path and had been warned that there were about eight youths, who appeared to be under the influence of drugs also on the tow path. They politely moved out of the way as the coach cycled past. When the coach returned one of the youths was flaying around and the others were shouting. It appeared that the youth was

having a seizure. The other youths disappeared, so the coach called the Emergency Services. The youth was lying on his side so the coach supported him in that position.

The youth started to regain consciousness but was very incoherent and started crawling towards the river. The ambulance arrived within about five minutes and the crew took the youth into their care.

This incident emphasises the need for coaches to carry their phones with them.

Anti-social behaviour

A J16 rower was walking to the club for an indoor training session when he was stopped by several youths on bikes and wearing balaclava's. They reportedly asked the rower what he had on him, and did he have any cash, they initially prevented him from heading to training but rode off soon afterwards. When he did arrive at the club he was visibly shaken by the incident and upset at being late, but thankfully unharmed. A coach sat with him with a cup of tea and his mother was called. The mother reported the incident to the Police who said that they will increase patrols in the area on Monday and Wednesday evenings when the juniors train.

In another incident, a crew of J14s in a 4x+ were filmed by a man standing on his boat. He shouted at the coach that they were not allowed to row or drive a launch there (they were). There have been similar incidents with other crews in the area.

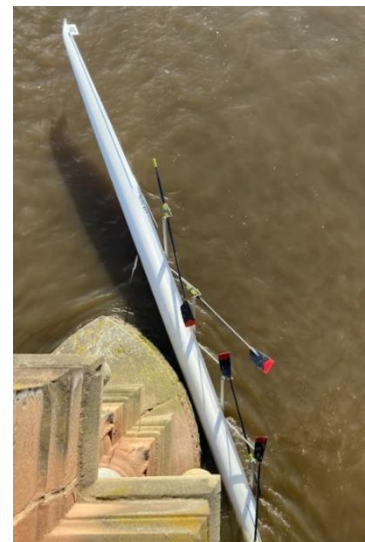
In a further incident, a 4+ was turning before the weir, when a group of children (thought to be aged around 16) kicked their rubbish at the boat as it went past. As the boat rowed away, one child threw what was thought to be a rock at the boat. It landed on the far side of the boat in the water so none of the crew were injured. It was recommended that this incident should be reported to the Police.

In another incident a 2- was travelling behind a private cruiser. This cruiser was producing a large wake and swerving all over the river. The 2- caught up to the cruiser and waited for them to clear a bridge before attempting to overtake the cruiser. Upon realizing that the 2- was attempting to overtake, the cruiser sped up, to produce even greater wake. People on the cruiser were clearly aware of the consequences of their wash on the 2-. The vessel then started swerving, to create even greater wash. The 2- took on enough water that it was no longer row-able.

Take care after the finish of a race

After the finish of a head race a 4x hit a bridge buttress and was held there, for a time, by the flow. The boat capsized and the crew entered the water. They were subsequently rescued by the safety launches and taken ashore.

It has separately been reported that the response was delayed as the officials were focussed on the finish line and were not aware of the boat fast on the bridge. This is being investigated by the Regional Rowing Safety Adviser.



Get help when towing

As the trailer loaded with boats was towed away from the club the driver had to turn to the left more than expected, which caused the rear of the trailer to swing out wider to the right. In doing so, the boat on the upper, most right-hand side scraped against the upper section of an empty trailer causing damage to the upper deck of the boat.

It was suggested that drivers should consider asking someone to help when they are manoeuvring a trailer in a tight space. Having a "banksman" with another pair of eyes outside of the towing vehicle can help immeasurably. It is important to have good communications between the driver and the banksman, this normally involves opening the towing vehicle window so that the driver can hear the banksman when they speak or shout.



A lesson learned

A coach in a launch was coaching two 8s rowing side by side and trying to call focus on training when, suddenly, 2x appeared from fog there was a collision. The coach was asked why they were in the centre of the river, particularly in fog as things tend to happen suddenly when they are not predicted and reminded of the responsibility is to keep their crew, and others, safe.

The response was that they were trying to do side by side training with our two senior men 8+'s. The coach was focussed on the rowers and not on the river ahead.

When asked what had been learned from this experience, the coach explained that they have learned that when visibility is as low, they should assess whether side by side training is safest for all river users, ideally avoiding it entirely. When coaching with side-by-side training, they should remain vigilant on keeping close attention to the river ahead, ensuring that there is enough time to react to oncoming traffic.

A lesson well learned and of value to others.

It is not just high flow rates that cause problems

A cox moved their 8 towards the bank to avoid other boats. There is a low hanging tree, which under normal conditions a boat can easily fit under. However, due to the river being significantly higher than normal there was not enough vertical clearance and a rower's head was hit by a branch. Initially the rower appeared to be unharmed, and the boat pulled into the bank. There was no visible injury and the rower was happy to continue with the last piece of the outing. After that piece, the rower was not feeling well so the boat rowed home with stern 6.

When boat landed, the rower was assessed by Head Coach, who provided a concussion assessment. The rower went to hospital for further medical assessment.

Check the shoes as well as the heel restraints

A 2x capsized and one rower had difficulty removing one foot from a shoe. The rower was assisted by a coach in a launch who reached under the boat to help release their foot. The rowers were taken ashore in the launch. The heel restraints had been checked prior to the outing and a one had been replaced, however the material of the shoe the heel restraint was attached to snapped during the capsize: the sole of the shoe had also torn in the middle allowing the heel to move even further whilst still attached to the footplate. Please check the condition of shoes when you check heel restraints.

In a similar incident where a rower had difficulty removing their feet it was found to have heel restraints but the shoes were so worn that these were ineffective.

Check your launches too

A coach was trying to separate the bows of an 8x and a 4+ that had collided. The coach was leaning against the upright safety bars on the catamaran launch which consequently broke and the coach fell into the water. The coach's kill cord caused the engine to stop and their lifejacket self-inflated. They were able to climb back into their launch and another coach came to support. The club will ensure that the remaining safety bars on catamaran launches are securely fixed in place or remove them if joins are weak. Please check yours.

“Cox's blind spot” excuse (again)

There was a collision head on collision between an 8 that was passing a stationery boat and a 4+. The 4+ was said to be in the cox's blind spot directly ahead.

It was suggested that if a cox does not know that the waterway ahead is clear then they must stop. If the cox cannot see what is ahead then they should ask a crew member to check and let them know. It is not safe to row if whoever is in charge of the boat does not know what is ahead. The club responded that they will be running an internal cox safety refresher session to make sure this is clear to everyone.

Do not rely on calls from other crews

A crew was told by a coach of another club that they should have called out to warn an approaching crew. Warning calls are very helpful, and this practice should be encouraged, but they cannot be relied upon. Coxes and steers still have a responsibility to ensure that they know what is ahead. If they cannot see for themselves then they should ask a crew member for help.

Take care with Long Hair

I recently referred to the incident in Limerick where a young rower was trapped underwater when her 4x+ capsized and her hair became entangled in a rigger. A school coach wrote to say that they had previously allowed girls to wear their hair in a ponytail or bunches (boys at the school are not allowed long hair). The coaches now feel that plaited hair would be much safer (especially French plaits which hold the hair close to the scalp). The coach felt that loose hair is something that is often overlooked as a danger.

The response was that this issue was first mentioned in the Monthly Report of February 2019, the month the incident happened. I suggested that "any rower with long hair may find it helpful to wear their hair in a "bun" or "top knot" and included the photo opposite.

There was recently some discussion about whether the rowers hair was plaited or not at the time of the incident. It may have been easier to free her unplaited hair by tearing it strand by strand rather than trying to untangle a plait. Her plaited hair could, in effect, have formed a rope that would be difficult to break.



The rower's hair was extremely long, well below waist length.

The following expectation appears in RowSafe: -

"Everyone is expected to:

- Ensure that they are dressed appropriately for the conditions and that their hair, if long, is tied up into a bun or "top knot" such that it does not interfere with their rowing and cannot be entangled in the equipment in the boat."*

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 included an incident where several canoeists came to assist a 4x that suffered rudder failure and drifted into bushes.

In another incident a rowing club launch went to the assistance of two paddleboarders who were held fast against a moored vessel and who fell from their boards into the water. One of paddleboarders was found clinging onto a pontoon and the other drifted 50 metres downstream. Both were rescued and their paddleboards were also retrieved.

Helpers' Training

There was recently a request for training material on how to lead a crew to lift and carry a boat, this is not in the Rower Development Guide or in RowSafe.

There is something on this in the presentation in the Tutor Resources for the Classic Coxing Workshop, here, [Section: Tutor Resources | Classic Rowing Coxing Workshop | Home \(rowhow.org\)](#). The relevant section starts on slide 57.

During Covid we produced a set of guides to help people, such as parents, with little or no knowledge to be competent enough to provide some assistance to rowers and their clubs so that coaches would be free to deliver more coaching.

The Helpers Training includes further information and videos on lifting and carrying boats, and many other topics, including safety. The material was shared with the person making the request and their response was that it is "really good stuff and I will use it for our Health and Safety". The Helpers Training is posted in both Dropbox and a Google Drive. Please contact safety@britishrowing.org if you would like access.

When is it safe to wear a flotation suit

There has been some discussion about the use of Flotation Suits by coaches and coxes. These typically consist of an outer waterproof layer, a middle layer of soft foam to provide buoyancy and thermal insulation and an inner lining. They are available both as one-piece garments and as separate jackets and chest high trousers.



I have one of these with separate Jacket and Chest High Trousers. It provides both protection against the cold and wet, and flotation.

I would recommend it for coaches in launches.

Coxes in bow loaders should be forbidden from them for the same reasons that they are forbidden from wearing auto-inflation lifejackets and buoyancy aids. They would prevent their escape from an inverted boat.

Flotation suits may be suitable for coxes in stern loaders providing they do not become "jammed" or "wedged" into their boats. Flotation suits are quite bulky.

The response when asked about alternatives was that under the lifejacket coxes should wear something warm and water- and wind proof but NOT BUOYANT, and preferably not too bulky. Maybe this could consist of several layers with the outer layer being waterproof. Take care with the base layer as this should provide thermal insulation and absorb moisture. Sweating and then getting cold should be avoided.

Water Quality Information

There was a request for information on water quality. Information can be found on the British Rowing website here [Sustainability - British Rowing](#). Scroll down and click on “Check your local EDM Map” then select the EDM Map for the applicable Water Company.

Printed copies of RowSafe

There have been requests for British Rowing to provide printed copies of RowSafe.

The response was that we no longer produce printed copies, we stopped doing this at least 16 years ago. It is easy to download RowSafe and print it, but it will be updated again in early 2025. Copies you print now will go out of date quite soon. Also, RowSafe contains many hyperlinks to other areas of the British Rowing website and beyond, these will not be effective if the document is printed.

Older version of RowSafe removed

We have been troubled for some time with people finding and quoting the obsolete (2008) version of RowSafe on the British Rowing website. It was difficult to remove then as it was in a folder that was outside of the content management system, so could not be deleted. The website has been moved to a new server and this folder was not copied.