



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

February 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Consequences of an antisocial behaviour incident at a Regatta

My report of [June 2024](#) contains information about several anti-social behaviour incidents. One was at a regatta where a pleasure boat with three persons on board was reported to be deliberately interfering with a regatta. The boat was driven onto the course (subject to a river closure) and then moved upstream towards the crews marshalling at the start, travelling at speed and washing down crews in the navigation channel. There was considerable verbal abuse from the driver throughout the incident. This incident was recorded on video and reported to the Navigation Authority and the Police.

The driver of the boat was subsequently charged with five offences, four of them relating to the incident at the regatta. The offences were: -

1. failing to comply with a Harbour Master's Notice (there was a river closure in force at the time)
2. obstructing or interfering with a boat race and endangering the safety of persons assembled
3. using abusive or threatening behaviour
4. navigating without due care and attention
5. navigating in an unregistered vessel

The Environment Agency barrister made a point of taking the court through the statements and then played the video evidence to show the nature of the incident, how dangerous and abusive the driver's behaviour had been. The court grasped the gravity of the incident. The court found that the incident was shocking in its totality, there was clear criminality and that the driver's actions endangered other people and put particularly young people involved in the racing at risk. The matter needed to be dealt with robustly to send the appropriate message that this kind of behaviour would not be tolerated. On this basis they were able to justify going outside the Band A fine range usually applied in these types of cases.

The fines were as follows: -

1. £50 for breaching the Harbour Master's Notice
2. the maximum penalty of £1,000 for the obstructing / endangering offence
3. £440 for using offensive and threatening behaviour
4. the maximum penalty of £1,000 for navigating without care and attention and
5. £220 for not registering the vessel

He was also ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £1084, compensation of £265.54 for the registration fee and £275 costs. A total of £4,334.54.

This shows the value of collecting clear and objective evidence and providing it to the Navigation Authority.

There is more information on the British Rowing website here

<https://www.britishrowing.org/2025/02/motor-boat-driver-prosecuted-by-environment-agency-for-anti-social-behaviour-during-kingston-regatta/> and in the Environment Agency press release here <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thames-river-rage-drama-ends-with-huge-fine>.

Incidents in February

Keep well clear of Weirs

A coach on a bike was coaching an 8+ when they heard shouts for help from the crew of a 4x+. The 4x+ was being held broadside on across a weir on one side of the river, their boat was being pressed against the large green buoys and their oars were over them. They were unable to move due to the pressure of the water and were stuck on the weir buoy line. They had no coach with them. The crew had been swept into the buoy line as they were trying to turn.



The coach instructed their crew to keep clear and then quickly cycled to the nearest bridge to cross the river and try to approach the 4x+. The coach instructed the crew to stop pulling their oars in as they were trying to push off the buoy line and explained that keeping the boat stable was a greater priority. Fortunately, the coach could just reach the stern of the 4x+ and was able to move the boat off the buoy line and alongside the bank.

Please discourage crews from turning anywhere near the upstream side of a weir and encourage them to keep well clear of weirs. There is more information in the Safety Alerts here [Safety-Alert-Flow-over-Weirs.pdf](#) and here [Safety-Alert-Keep-clear-of-Weirs-Dec-2019.pdf](#).

Take care when fitting detachable wing riggers

A novice 4x+ became difficult to control following a wing rigger becoming detached. This resulted in the boat being caught on obstructions on the bank and being swept around by the stream thus breaking parts of the bow. After the incident, another coach reported that one of the crew members was adjusting the quick release bolts on the rigger that came loose, and after that no coach or the cox checked the boat again before getting on the water.

In another incident a boat was checked before an outing and only one side of the rigger was properly attached. The other side looked as if it was attached to the boat but would have detached from the hull almost immediately under load. This is the second or third time that this boat has been found in this state.

If you use boats with wing riggers then please ensure that rowers and coaches know how to fit them correctly (check the manufacturer's instructions). Please ensure that all boats are checked before going afloat.

Take care where you place your less experienced rowers

The crew of an 8+ consisted of four very experienced and strong rowers and four small and unfit beginners; the beginners at bow four and the experienced rowers were stern four. The crew were rowing upstream and had to pass a fallen tree on their approach to a bridge. They had to approach the bridge slowly. One of the rowers decided not to row on when asked and the crew was swept sideways towards a bridge support.

Please take care when allocating seats in a crew boat to ensure that experienced rowers are well distributed in the boat so that they can support the less experienced and respond to commands correctly.

Take care of your rowers particularly when it is cold

After the end of a head race in cold weather whilst returning to land, a cox noticed that a rower had begun to show signs of decreased responsiveness. When they left the boat, their condition deteriorated so that other club members had to help them to stand. They were taken into a boathouse where wet layers were removed and dry layers put on. The rower briefly lost consciousness for a few seconds and was put into the recovery position with dryrobes beneath and over them. Two paramedics were called to the incident. The rower gradually began to improve, and after a while was able to stand and was fully responsive.

Please take care to ensure that when your rowers go afloat in cold conditions that they have enough layers to keep them warm. You can learn more about not getting cold at heads here [Safety Alert - Not getting cold at heads.docx](#)

Take care with your straps when towing

One of the boat ties, securing a boat to a trailer, became loose in transit following the loaded trailer being parked at the club overnight. A club member following the trailer noticed this but could not contact the driver. The club is considering the following measures

1. Club members to be trained in how to tie straps correctly
2. A second person to check each strap individually, not just "wiggle" the boats
3. All straps including those on the top deck to be checked on completion of boat loading
4. All straps to be checked again immediately prior to towing (when the trailer has been parked overnight)
5. Driver of towing vehicle to have a mobile phone with them and ensure it is switched on
6. Driver of towing vehicle to have an assistant (support person) with them, also with a mobile phone switched on.

Take care to supervise your rowers all the time

A junior rower sustained a blow to the head from a child's metal scooter as it was swung around by their crew mate who is also their sibling. The rower did not lose consciousness. The parents took the rower to A & E, and a doctor suspected mild concussion, the rower is to abstain from rowing for two weeks.

Please ensure that all juniors are supervised by a responsible adult at all times when they are at the club.

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

Take care on slippery landing stages

There have been several incidents where rowers have slipped on landing stages. In one incident a rower was walking down to pick up the boat off the water and slipped on the wooden edge of the landing stage. As they fell into the water, they hit their face on the boat and cut open their lip.

In another incident three rowers slipped and fell on a pontoon due to back ice. One rower had a concussion serious enough to warrant a visit to A&E. The rower had a CT scan that night and took two weeks to recover.

What to do if you experience anti-social behaviour

A coach had an interaction with the driver of a hire boat who appeared not to be in control of his boat. This resulted in considerable shouting of threats and abuse by the boat driver. The incident was reported to the Police and to the Navigation Authority. The club has revised its Safety Briefing Note and this now contains the following excellent advice: -

*“We are fortunate to have a relatively remote and rural stretch of river to enjoy, nevertheless members have, from time to time, experienced antisocial behaviour; the occasional grumpy fisherman, the odd group of bored youths lobbing stones, the thankfully infrequent launch or boat pilot with dubious piloting skills. Now and again, we might find ourselves dealing with aggression, foul or abusive language and threatening behaviour. If you do encounter this there are **three R’s** to remember;*

Don’t REACT, stay calm and polite, **REMOVE** yourself from the situation as quickly as you can and **REPORT** it to other crews, or the coaching team in the first instance then to the CRSA. Junior members and vulnerable adults should report the incident to the Welfare Officer too, directly or via the coaching team.

The CRSA will report the incident to British Rowing and assist you in making a report to both the police and to the Navigation Authority.

The police will deal with any instances of physical harm or threatening behaviour. “

Encourage rowers to talk to their coach if they have a health concern

A cox in a bow loaded 4+ hit their neck on a support and lost consciousness during practice starts. After the outing the cox explained that they were suffering from low blood pressure in the mornings and had consulted their doctor. The cox subsequently phoned their mother and went home after the outing.

Take Care of what rowers wear

A J14 rower in a 4x chose to wear cotton hoody instead of his waterproof layer for an organised timed 3k row on a cold day and became very wet from backsplash of rest of crew. The rower suffered uncontrolled shivering and became very cold and very unhappy. At the boathouse the rower changed into dry clothes and put on a warm parka coat and was then given a warm cup of tea. Please take care to advise rowers on appropriate clothing. There is more information on hoodies later in this report.

Take care if a rower is exposed to water that could be contaminated

A rower was involved in the swamping incident, they went home and became unwell, were vomiting and unable to eat. The rower phoned 111 and they advised that if vomiting continued to go to A&E the following morning. Overnight, the sickness had not subsided. The rower went to A&E where they were placed on an IV drip and prescribed antibiotics. The rower was unable to work for three days.

The club's coaches continue to encourage strong hand hygiene post-session and take preventative measures such as bring all food and drinks required for the session in sealed plastic bags.

In another incident a rower was feeling ill after exposure to river water. The rower was sitting behind someone who was quite splashy. During high rate pieces the rower was splashed in the face. This resulted in them having an upset stomach for most of day and runny stools. Lots of fluids were taken.

The “blind spot” excuse is never valid

A cox in an 8+ is reported to have said that they were racing doing a timed piece and there was a 4x in their blind spot for the entirety of the time, they didn't see the crew until they were half a length behind them. They also said that the 4x should have shouted for us to lookout earlier. The “blind spot excuse” is never valid, even for a short time and nobody should rely on others shouting warnings.

In another incident a crew was stationary and tucked in when an 8+ collided, at full speed, with their stern. Members of the stationary 8+ had shouted but neither the cox of the 8+ or their bank rider appeared to have noticed the crew.

The collision resulted the bow rigger of the 8+ colliding with the stern canvas dragging the rudder, rudder shaft & steering tube through about 30cm of the canvas. The rigger hit the cox. Both boats had backstays on all riggers.



In another incident collision was avoided but two groups of boats were un-intentionally operating on an opposing circulation on a canal that requires a one-way system. The cox of an 8+ reported that the 4- was in their blind spot. The 8+ only stopped when they heard shouted warnings from the 4-.

This is specified in [RowSafe](#): -

Coxes and steers (including scullers) are expected to:

- *Always keep a good lookout when afloat. Coxes who cannot see directly ahead should enlist the help of members of their crew. Steers should consider using a head mounted mirror or similar device.*
- *If the cox or steers does not know that the water ahead is clear then they should stop, or at the very least, slow down.*

Never rely on warnings from other crews. These can be very helpful, but coxes and steers are alone responsible for the navigation of their boats.

Take care with your launch fuel connection

A safety launch motor cut out, so the launch driver paddled the launch to the nearby bank. The launch had previously been checked and was working correctly. Attempts to restart the motor were unsuccessful. It was found that the fuel line connector was not fully pushed in to the fitting on the motor.

This was a simple mistake to make and, in this case, did no harm but engine failure on a fast-flowing river upstream of a hazard (e.g. a weir) could be hazardous. Please take care.

Take care where you put your lifejackets

Two auto inflation lifejackets were put into the launch, which had collected rainwater. They auto inflated. There were no spare cylinders available. Another auto inflation lifejacket and buoyancy aids were used for the outing.

Take care not to keep rowers waiting on the water for a protracted time

A rower in an 8+ lost consciousness at the end of a race and fell out of the boat. They regained consciousness upon entering the water. The rower was eventually rescued by Race Marshals using throw lines. The rower was immediately attended to by paramedics.

The crew had become extremely cold before the race began as they had been waiting at marshalling in the rain for almost two hours. The weather was very cold with bursts of rain and hail.

The crew reported that they were all terrified and shouting help from the boat. The rower in the water was screaming while frantically trying to keep their head above the water. Once the rower was pulled in, they collapsed on the bank. The paramedics rushed over, meanwhile many of the rowers in the boat were hysterically crying. They had to wait to allow the cox to stop crying. At this point they didn't know whether their friend would recover.

Please take great care to ensure that crews are not held on the water for protracted periods prior to racing.

Take extra care with Adaptive Rowers

An adaptive rower who uses straps went afloat on a cold day wearing a padded jacket. The rower connected two Velcro straps with about 8 cm of overlap. When the rower started rowing a few metres from the pontoon both straps separated. The rower felt unstable but returned safely to the pontoon, the padded jacket was removed and the outing continued.

It was later found that some of the Velcro was contaminated with threads and that the Velcro did not extend to the end of the straps.

I am advised that in these circumstances, a padded jacket not a good idea. If it is cold enough for a padded jacket the person should probably not be out as some adaptive rowers often have problems with thermoregulation.

87% of British Rowing Clubs have access to AEDs

An analysis on some of the data in this year's Safety Audit shows that 62% of British Rowing Clubs have an AED in the club and a further 26% have access to one close to the club. The regional distribution is as follows: -

Region	Number of Clubs	AED in Club	AED Close to Club	AED not In Club and not Close to Club
East Midlands	22	16	6	0
Thames London	60	51	7	2
Western	18	7	10	1
West Midlands	28	22	4	2
WAGS	27	19	6	2
Thames Upper	111	77	25	9
Thames Southeast	19	11	6	2
Southeast Coast	8	5	2	1
Eastern	86	47	27	12
Northwest	33	17	10	6
Yorkshire	19	9	6	4
Wessex and H&D	23	13	5	5
Northern	45	13	15	17
TOTAL	499	307	129	63

In last month's [report](#) I explained how AEDs can be used to save lives.

If your club does not have access to an AED, then please consider acquiring one. If you need help to do this then please contact your Regional Rowing Safety Adviser or me.

Hazard Reporting

A member of a club Safety Team, who are about to set up a Hazard Reporting system, asked whether there was already a system in place that they could learn from. The response was that the biggest problem with risk assessment is failing to identify a hazard; if the hazard is not identified then the risk cannot be assessed. There is guidance on hazard identification in the Safety Basics training here [Course: Safety Basics - Understanding and Managing Risk | Home](#).

Many hazards are listed in Chapter 9 of RowSafe. Some hazards are location specific, if there is another club on your stretch of river then you could work with them and share the task.

It was suggested that within the club, members could be informed that a hazard is anything that can cause harm and be given some examples. They can then be invited to report any that they find. This will help you to develop a register. This information can then be used to feed into your risk assessment process.

Reporting will also enable information to be shared within the club so that other rowers are prepared and can avoid the hazard.

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

Protecting a rower with a Nut allergy

A club was concerned that a new rower has a severe nut allergy and that, in the event of a severe anaphylactic incident a Coach may have to use an EpiPen to save the life of the rower. I received the following medical advice.

EpiPens are designed and supposed to be a self-administration device. They should only be used by others, rather than by the patient, if the patient is unconscious or unable to administer the EpiPen or has requested help.

So, in the vast majority of cases the EpiPen should be self-administered, and this also applies to teenage patients. The parents of the Junior Rower may have procedures in place for the use of the EpiPen and this should be investigated before the club take on any responsibility for the use of the device. If necessary, the club should approach the GP or the prescriber of the EpiPen (with the permission of the parents) for further guidance.

People with food allergies know what they can eat and what not to eat. The difficulty comes when the junior is in a boat on the water. It would be exceptional if an allergic response were to be triggered when afloat unless the individual eats or drink a 'forbidden' product. So, in the simplest terms, the junior must not eat or drink whilst afloat, unless it is their own personal food or drink.

The junior should always carry their EpiPen(s) and so they should be available in the boat for their own personal use. This will require the provision of waterproof packaging or container to store the EpiPen(s) with the junior (NOT in the coach launch).

If there is an event then the crew should stop rowing, allow their colleague to self-administer the EpiPen, call 999 and get the junior to a landing area immediately to await medical care. It is important to be aware that a second EpiPen may be required after 5 minutes, and the junior should be out of the boat by this time.

The actions are relatively simple but do need to be understood by the crew members and any coaches involved.

Using an EpiPen is relatively simple, provided that the instructions are followed carefully. The most common error is inadvertent self-administration by someone trying to help. There is more information at <https://www.epipen.co.uk/en-GB/public> and particularly at <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/4289/pil>.

Anaphylaxis does require a trigger, the nature of which the junior should be aware of. The EpiPen does save lives in an acute anaphylactic event, and if it has to be administered by a third party then this should be seen as a life-saving emergency intervention.

There should be no concerns about liability as the [Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015](#) effectively absolves a person who reasonably uses an EpiPen to save a person's life from any civil liability.

If someone is in trouble, then stop and help

A 4+ capsized during a race, there was an attempt to rescue rowers in the water using a catamaran launch. The launch started to sink when three rowers attempted to climb on to it. The three rowers went back into the water. The launch driver called for help, but it was slow to arrive. The driver used the “PAN-PAN” prefix, in this case it would have been better to use the MAYDAY prefix as the water was cold and there was “grave and imminent danger of loss of life”. This should have elicited a more rapid response.

[RowSafe](#) Section 5.2.1 Recovering a Person from the Water into a Launch, includes the following: -

There are sometimes alternatives to helping the rower to climb into a launch. It is possible to have the rower sit on their inverted boat, or in the water holding onto their boat, and then tow the boat to the bank. This can be done by driving the launch in reverse so as to keep the propellor away from the casualty. This works best when the water is not too cold.

Other competitors could have stopped to help the rowers in the water, perhaps using Buddy Rescue, but they did not. They simply rowed past the incident. The Competitors instructions for a competition in another Region include the following: -

*“COMPETITORS SHOULD ENSURE THAT AN INCIDENT IS KNOWN TO A LAUNCH OR A MARSHAL. THEY SHOULD **STOP RACING** TO GIVE ASSISTANCE IF SOMEONE IS IN DANGER IN THE WATER.”*

The following is included in the competition safety plan: -

10) IF AN INCIDENT OCCURS

Competitors can help in the case where an incident occurs by: -

- a) *Continuing down the course and informing a safety launch or marshal who will have radio contact.*
- b) *Stopping to give assistance where there is someone in difficulty in the water, unconscious, or in danger of being run down by oncoming crews. It is a difficult decision to stop racing, but the priority of us all is the safety and wellbeing of our fellow rowers and scullers.*

Please understand that helping a fellow rower whose life is in danger is far more important than a position in a race.

Children driving launches

I was asked whether the [Safety Alert on Children Driving Launches](#) is still current. I replied that it is still valid as we continue to be concerned that launch drivers can find themselves in stressful rescue situations and, if they are still a child, then they may lack the maturity to deal with these incidents. Having a mature and responsible adult in the launch with them will help. This is a matter of maturity and not one of competence.

What should you do if you feel harassed?

A coach has reported several incidents in which the same person came out onto the deck of their boat and filmed them and their junior crews. The coach once again questioned the person, and they said that they were not filming the young rowers but were filming the coach to report them to the Navigation Authority. The coach again told the person that the launch was licensed, and all the crews were in boats that were licensed.

When they got back to the boathouse one of the rowers said that, when the coach was not present, this person had filmed the rowers when they had returned to row past.

The following advice was provided. In general, it is not illegal to video someone in a public place. However, if this action constituted Harassment, then it may be contrary to Section 1 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Section 1 of this Act starts by saying: -

"1 *Prohibition of harassment.*

(1) A person must not pursue a course of conduct—

(a) which amounts to harassment of another, and

(b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other."

The Act can be found here: - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/40/contents>.

Please consider reporting incidents like this to the Police with a request that they warn the person that they may be committing an offence.

Non-rowing death at a weir

I came across a Paddle UK Safety Alert, it can be found here [River Tay Tragic Incident | Paddle UK](#). There is further information on the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service website here [Company sentenced for failings that led to child's death on River Tay | COPFS](#). This relates to the death of a 12-year-old boy who tragically drowned during a river boarding session on the River Tay in 2019.

Our advice to rowers remains "[Keep Away From Weirs](#)", also see "[Flow over Weirs](#)".

The following principles apply at all rowing clubs: -

- complete a suitable and sufficient risk assessment
- use the risk assessment to define safety rules, operating procedures, safety plans, etc. and
- ensure that all members always comply with these rules, operating procedures, safety plans, etc.

In my view weirs are the most serious safety hazard that clubs have to manage and the greatest threat to life that rowers face.

Theft of Outboards

A club reported the overnight theft of all its outboard motors. The local RRSA was asked to notify other clubs in the area as it is not unknown for gangs of outboard thieves to operate in one area for a while before moving on.

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

Hoodies and Sun Hoodies

I was asked for confirmation on whether a club should require its members not to wear hoodies when afloat. This is currently a club rule, but this has recently been challenged by a couple of difficult members. The advice was that the statement in [RowSafe](#) about hoodies is

“Everyone is expected to:

- *Not wear a hoodie when rowing or sculling as the thumbs tend to catch in the pocket, or when coxing in a bow-loader as it could become entangled and impede a rapid exit.”*

There has also been a separate request for information about the wearing of “Sun Hoodies” when afloat. These are designed to cover the upper body and provide UV protection.

I explained that the problem with conventional hoodies is: -

The issues with conventional hoodies are: -

- they are not waterproof and can become waterlogged (rowers get wet and cold)
- they are loose fitting and have front pockets so it is easy to get thumbs, handles, etc., entangled in the folds and pockets, and
- wearing a hood can restrict the view when trying to look over a shoulder

and asked whether these would be issues with Sun Hoodies.

The response was that Sun Hoodies are made of the same material as tech tops so will not become waterlogged and they are tight fitting with no front pockets. They normally fit tightly to the head but may, in some cases, cause problems looking ahead.

We agreed that a reasonable compromise would be to prohibit the use of Sun Hoodies by single scullers and steerspersons of coxless boats and by rowers who may be asked to look ahead and assist the cox.

In my view Sun Hoodies are not the same as conventional Hoodies and should be treated differently.

RowSafe updates

It is that time of year when we review and update RowSafe. If you have any suggestions, then please let me know. Write to safety@britishrowing.org.

Problems with the Incident Reporting System

On behalf of the National Rowing Safety Committee, I would like to thank everyone who has persisted in trying to report incidents using the Incident Reporting system. As you may know, the software infrastructure that supports this system is old and has become unreliable. Please continue to be persistent and thank you for doing so.

Incident reporting is everyone’s chance to make a significant contribution to rowing safety. We learn from what you report, and we try to share the learning to everyone’s benefit. We cannot do this without your help. Thanks again.

Finding a Dead Body in the water

A coach was preparing for an outing when they noticed a red object in the water floating downstream. This was initially dismissed as something like a detached fender. It was later noticed that the object had floated downstream and was in the middle of the river where it would cause a problem to rowers. The coach proceeded along the towpath to check whether it would be an issue and, at the same time, a single sculler heading downstream reached it.

The sculler, the coach and a passing runner who stopped to help, began to nudge the object towards the towpath. Whilst doing so it quickly became clear that the object was a body. The runner immediately contacted the police while the sculler took up a position that would ensure that the body could not drift back out into the river. The coach informed the other coaches and instructed all the marshalled crews to remain in place as they were expecting to start training.

Shortly after all crews proceeded back to their landing stages at a paddle and the coach waited for the police. The rowers were informed of the situation and everyone stopped all activity until given further instruction by the police. The whole club was later contacted by the Club Welfare Officer with a brief comment on the incident, an open invitation to talk if needed and links to appropriate external help and resources.

In my view, this incident was handled very well in that the number of people "exposed" to the sight of the body was minimised and the right information was shared at the correct time.

Membership of British Rowing entitles members to Mental Health Support through the insurance cover. There is more information here [Members](#). There is also information on Mental Health here [Supporting Positive Mental Health - British Rowing](#).