



BRITISHROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

June 2019

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

A little good news

The February 2019 monthly report contained information about an incident in Limerick, in the Republic of Ireland, in which a 12-year-old girl, was trapped in a capsized 4x+. She was rescued by the crew of a launch from a Limerick Fire and Rescue Service that was patrolling in the area. The crew had to cut her hair in order to free her from the boat.

First aid was provided by the crew including the provision of CPR in the Rescue Boat. She was taken to hospital and treated in Intensive Care.

Information has recently [been published](#) showing that she has survived the incident and her recovery continues.

This shows the importance of good, prompt, pre-hospital care and the effectiveness of longer-term care in hospital, together with the resilience of young rowers. We should never give up in what may appear to be a difficult situation.

Incident Reports in June

Rower collapses after the finish

Immediately after the finish of the L J16 4x+ race over 1000 metres and against four other crews, the stroke collapsed, started fitting for about 20 seconds, became unresponsive, fitted again for about 10 seconds and became unconscious lying back in the boat. Her cox, who is a doctor, called for help but could not easily reach the sculler.

She was rescued using a [Wheelyboat](#) with the ramp lowered to form a stable platform at the water level. The transfer from the rowing boat to the wheelyboat was relatively straightforward although the sculler did experience some bruising. The sculler and the doctor were taken ashore, the sculler being on the floor of the boat in the recovery position; she was carried ashore, still unconscious, on a paddleboard. Once ashore, an ambulance was called.

Still on the paddleboard, she was wrapped in a blanket and tended by the doctor/cox and her parents. She slowly became more responsive but did not recover full consciousness.

This is not the first time this sculler has collapsed, and she is under the care of her local hospital. The doctor was aware of her condition. She was still not fully conscious when her father lifted her from the paddleboard and carried her into the ambulance.

A subsequent phone conversation with her mother together with an email from her father shows that she was taken to the local hospital and released at about 9:00 pm. She appeared cheerful and happy. She was hungry and ate on arrival at home. She remembered the race (up to the point where she collapsed) and enjoyed the regatta.





Bow ball penetrates a hull

There were two collisions in which a bow ball penetrated the hull of another boat. One occurred at a bumps race and the other as the damaged boat was spinning at a designated turning point. Fortunately, nobody was injured in either collision although the boats were damaged. This shows that we cannot rely on bow balls to provide protection in the event of a collision. Collision avoidance (i.e. keeping a good lookout, adhering to the circulation plan, wearing hi-vis, etc.) are much more effective.

In another incident the bows of a boat hit a “tin fish” and broke off. Bow balls do not protect the boats that they are fitted to either.

Wear hi-vis

There was a collision between the bow of one boat and the stern of another at a crossing point. It is reported that, prior to the collision, neither crew saw the other. Both crews were wearing brightly coloured rowing kit, but neither was wearing hi-vis. The Safety Alert on “[Collision Avoidance](#)” provides further guidance and demonstrates the effectiveness of hi-vis kit.

Trailer Incidents

In one incident, the handbrake failed to work when the trailer was parked on a slope; the wheels were then chocked. The recent Safety Alert , “[Check your trailer](#)” addresses trailer maintenance.

In another incident a boat was being loaded onto a trailer when a vehicle, carrying a pair of sculls sticking up in the back, drove underneath the boat. The sculls hit the boat causing damage and injury.

Another club lost the stern section of a 4 on a motorway. The Safety Alert , “[Check your trailer](#)” also addresses strapping boats to trailers.

Contamination

There has been another incident, following the two reported last month, of a rower falling into water, in this case from steep steps, and becoming ill. The rower suffered vomiting, nausea, fever and diarrhoea, and had to have a day off work. There is no effective prophylactic treatment following the ingestion of contaminated water (coke has no effect). Please take care not to fall in.

Launch Incidents

In one incident a launch turned too sharply and capsized. In another incident a launch driver was paying full attention to the boat (presumably the one being coached) and did not look ahead to see two boats coming towards the launch until the very last minute. Action was taken by all boats and the collision was avoided. In another incident a coach, alone in a launch, was seen driving at speed whilst filming a four on a mobile phone. It is not difficult to drive a launch safely, all it needs is a little skill, care and consideration. In these cases, greater care and consideration were needed. There is guidance to launch drivers in section 5.2 of [RowSafe](#).



Antisocial behaviour

Three local adults removed an emergency life ring and were throwing it around, both at each other and into the river. This was, quite correctly, reported to the Police. (Use 999 (or 112) if there is any prospect of catching the culprits in the act, otherwise use the police non-emergency number (101).)

If in doubt, Shout!

A collision was avoided when a coach on the bank shouted to warn the crews that a dangerous situation was developing. Warnings like this help to prevent collisions, please do not be afraid to shout.

Slips and falls

A rower slipped on goose droppings on a landing stage, fell onto the lateral aspect of their arm resulting in a radial head fracture and damage to muscle insertion and lateral elbow ligaments. These required surgical repair and several weeks of physiotherapy to regain elbow function.

In another incident, a coach slipped and fell on a concrete pontoon resulting in a left wrist fracture that was put in plaster by the hospital.

Care is needed off the water too.

Take care with outboards too!

A coach was lowering the outboard on the boat when their finger was trapped between the launch and the engine. This caused a large flap of epidermis from a point adjacent to the thumbnail to be detached and also very nearly removed their thumbnail. The coach was treated in A&E where it was determined that there was no fracture. The thumbnail and the flap of epidermis were repositioned and both were secured with steri-strips.

Take care when entering a launch too!

There was a drop of approximately 30cm from the jetty to the launch gunwale with a further 30 cm into the launch itself. A coach stepped heavily from a jetty into the launch pushing it away and causing it to heel sharply to the side that he had entered. He lost his balance and fell overboard in approximately 2m of water. The coach was wet but otherwise unharmed. The launch was not tied to the jetty and the coach was not wearing a lifejacket.

British Rowing Display at Henley Royal Regatta

We will have a trailer near the entrance to the boat tent area at this year's regatta to help promote membership and provide information on "Love Rowing", British Rowing's Charitable Foundation. Support has been provided on the risk assessment and method statement for this activity.



Support for a school rowing club

Extensive support has been provided to a school rowing club following the repeated suggestion from a parent that all rowers should wear lifejackets at all times when afloat. The parent's suggestions included some misinterpretations of British Rowing safety guidance, these are addressed below.

The parent is concerned that children are at risk because they may fall into cold water and succumb to cold water shock. Our data and evidence shows that this is not a significant risk for rowers because the probability of it happening is so low. Rowers do capsize, frequently, but they emerge cold and wet but otherwise unharmed. It is very rare for a rower, in the UK to be harmed, by cold water immersion. However, they may be harmed by ingestion of contaminated water (see elsewhere in this report) to which a lifejacket would provide little protection.

I review accidents from all over the world and even in this wider context it is rare for cold water shock to claim the life of a rower. There is a useful summary of serious incidents [here](#). This is valid information but there is no analysis and it draws no conclusions, this is just a series of horror stories however it does show that there is a high survival rate even in very adverse conditions.

We should also not forget that all three of the rowers who died in Arnhem were wearing inflated auto-inflation lifejackets and the two who survived were not (see below).

The coroners at both the Farouk (2005) and Blockley (2000) inquests did not challenge the case made for the non-use of lifejackets by rowers or the continuation of the general practice in our sport. These were the most recent drownings of rowers in British Rowing.

It is well known that wearing a lifejacket can impede the rowing stroke. Also rowers can get their hands caught on their lifejackets causing them to capsize.

In the event of a rower capsizing then their boat becomes their liferaft. Wearing an inflated lifejacket will reduce their ability to climb out of the cold water and find refuge in, or on, their boat.

British Rowing Safety in was reviewed by RoSPA in 2008 and there is a comprehensive report and on rowing safety generally on their [website](#). The recommendations in this report do not mention lifejackets for rowers.

Please remember that rowing is a safe sport (this is explained in the May monthly report); the UK drowning statistics show that more people drown in the bath each year than drown as a result of being in (or falling out of) "manually propelled boats".

The reason why rowing is safe because it takes place on and not in the water and because many people work very hard to make it safe. Rowers are coached and trained with safety in mind. They are expected to take care of their own safety and that of others.



Correction to a misinterpretation

In the February 2015 Safety Alert on [Lifejackets](#), it says:-

“If you are a cox, coach, launch driver or crew a lifejacket is your most important piece of equipment.”
and

“Coxes in bow-loaded boats should wear a manual inflation lifejacket, and so should coastal coxes who may get very wet during launch and recovery. If possible, everyone else should wear an automatic inflation lifejacket.”

These have been misinterpreted to mean that the “crew” of rowing boats should wear lifejackets and that “everyone else” includes rowers.

For the absence of any doubt, the word “crew” was intended to mean the **crew of the launch** and “everyone else” was intended to mean **everyone else who should wear a lifejacket**. It was never intended that either of these statements should be used to indicate that rowers should wear lifejackets.

Further, chapter 9 of RowSafe, [Topics covered in risk assessments](#), there is frequent reference to the use of Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs) as a control to reduce the severity of harm after a hazardous event has occurred. This is **not** a recommendation that rowers should wear lifejackets, as has been suggested, it is simply presented as one of many options.

RowSafe is very clear in [section 7.3](#) on Safety Aids that rowers should:-

“Wear a lifejacket if:

- *They cannot swim.*
- *They are juniors who have not completed a capsize drill.*
- *Because of a medical condition, there is a risk that they may become unconscious or immobile whilst afloat.*

These are the only circumstances where it is expected that rowers should wear a lifejacket although there is no reason why someone who wishes to wear, or whose club decides that they should wear one, should not do so.

Lightning guidance for outdoor events

Extensive lightning guidance has been developed by Professional Lighting & Sound Association (PLASA). The guide provides practical advice on the management of lightning risk at outside entertainment or leisure events. It considers:-

- crowd safety
- the protection of temporary structures, and
- the protection of critical electrical equipment and power systems

The guidance is available at [here](#).



Venue gets the all clear

There was an item in last month's report about an incident that resulted in widespread and ill-informed discussion on social media suggesting that an illness to be Weil's disease. Tests have now shown that these suspicions were unfounded. The venue is clear of these bacteria.

Risk Assessment for Narcolepsy

A request was received for a standard risk assessment that can be modified to address narcolepsy. Narcolepsy is a rare long-term brain condition that causes a person to suddenly fall asleep at inappropriate times.

The response was that the links to our risk assessment training and templates, etc. are on the website at <https://www.britishrowing.org/knowledge/safety/> and an extensive range of Risk Management Plans are in [Chapter 9](#) of RowSafe.

It was also suggested that consent from the cox should be sought so that guidance can be provided by the cox's medical team. They, and he or she, should be able to provide advice on what he or she can and cannot do safely. Often people with disorders like this become the expert in their own condition.

It is understood that some people with this disorder are permitted to drive. If the cox is permitted to drive then it may be safe for him or her to cox but care is needed as the event that they are hoping to compete in can be very stressful.

Correction

Last month I incorrectly summarised the results of the from the [incident analysis](#) in relation to serious incidents. The correct summary is, in 2018:-

Of the 59 incidents that caused more than one week off rowing:-

- 20 were due to collisions
- 31 were falls and other injuries
- 8 were health related
- 0 involved immersion in water

(See page 17 of the analysis, 1 collision was due to failure to check equipment.)

Of those 59, 18 were very serious (several weeks off rowing, or equivalent), of these:-

- 14 were on land
- 2 were attempted suicides (people who were rescued by rowers)
- 2 were broken bones caused by collisions (1 thumb and 1 wrist)

The most serious was the coach who cycled head first into a lamp post. He was off work and rowing for about 6 weeks.



Clarification from Arnhem

The following information was received from a colleague in Arnhem in relation to the fatal incident there (see the September and October 2017 Monthly reports).

"In the multiple fatality in Arnhem, all the people who died were wearing fully automatic inflatable lifejackets, which caused entrapment underneath a barge. Of the two survivors, one was wearing a hand-operated lifejacket and the other did not wear a life jacket."

My colleague also tells me that he is encouraging rowers at his club to wear manual inflation lifejackets when the water temperature is below 15C. The water in the Nieder Rhine can be very low. It is wide (120 m), fast-flowing river (5 – 6 km/hr) and shared with commercial barges (up to 100 m long).

I do not have a problem with this advice as it is based on his assessment of risk.

Capsize and Recovery Workshops

It is reported that a learner coach suffered a serious ear injury following repeated capsizes at a Capsize and Recovery Workshop. He wrote to say that:-

"I need to report an injury I sustained on the capsize course last Sunday. As a result of entering the water sideways, I have sustained damage to my right ear. On my journey home I experienced significant pressure in the ear, a headache and tinnitus. After a sleepless night, I spent yesterday at the hospital ENT where I was assessed. I have significant loss of hearing in my right ear, blood behind the eardrum and most critically bad tinnitus which is causing a huge amount of mental distress. At this stage, no one can tell me whether the loss of hearing and tinnitus will be permanent and I may require surgery to drain the blood from my ear within the next 6 weeks."

As a result, the following guidance is issued to Coach Educators leading these workshops:-

"The practical section of the Capsize and Recovery workshop involves some learner coaches entering the water. Please explain to all the learner coaches that they can successfully complete the course without entering the water providing they are present during the whole of the workshop (both theory and practical sessions). Please advise learner coaches that if they are suffering from any of the following:-

- recent ear infection,
- a past history of aural problems including any recent change in hearing, or
- have they had a recent upper respiratory tract infection, 'cold' or flu.

Then it may be advisable for them not to enter the water. "

This is a previously unheard of consequence of capsizing. We have not heard of similar consequences from practice or real capsizes.

Rowing Lifejackets

Advice was requested on lifejackets. Two styles of [Spinlock](#) lifejackets are under consideration. One is the “deckvest”, a conventional general purpose product for non-rowers (coxes, launch drivers and their crews, coaches and umpires afloat, etc.) and the other is a small belt mounted, manual inflation, “horseshoe life-ring”. The lifejacket is a perfectly acceptable standard product. However, my advice was that the life-ring has no place in rowing because:-

- It requires the user to
 - manually inflate it and once inflated,
 - position it correctly
- Once inflated it would get in the way of a rower trying to
 - get back into or onto their boat or
 - get into a rescue boat
- It provides relatively little buoyancy
- It is not suitable for juniors, only adults

There are better belt mounted products available such as the [Superlight Manual 150 N Rowing Bum Bag Lifejacket](#) (as shown here). This would be very suitable for Gig rowers who row in boats that do not have sufficient inherent buoyancy to support their crews when swamped and whose movement would be impeded by a conventional lifejacket.



Rowing in strong winds

A meeting was held with the Thames Regional Rowing Safety Adviser and the rower who raised the issue of making rowing boats more resilient so that they can safely be used in rough water. It was agreed that:-

- there could be no compromise on safety
- the loss of major head races would be regrettable
- it may be possible to adapt rowing boats to make them more resilient
- there are no easy answers or quick fixes and
- trials should be conducted to test the effectiveness of suggested improvements

The current suggested improvements include:-

- Fitting pumps to remove water from inside the boat to prevent it from swamping
- Fitting washboards to prevent reduce the volume of water taken on by the boat
- “Boxing in” the riggers to reduce the spray from them

If you are interested in conducting trials involving these, or any other approaches then please do so. Please feel free to provide information on any trials or suggest other approaches, write to safety@britishrowing.org.

I am currently reviewing evidence that appears to show that the frequency of major storms in the UK is tending to increase.



Mirrors

There is an example of an interesting use of mirrors [here](#). If you have any experience of using mirrors in this way or would like to give them a try then please contact me at safety@britishrowing.org.

Do launch drivers need to have lifeguard qualifications?

This request came from the Head of Rowing at a school, based on a query from a parent. The response was as follows:-

I used to have a lifesaving qualification until it expired in about 1972. I have never used those skills other than in simulations and practice. They are not needed by a safety boat driver.

You are quite correct to say that a safety boat driver should not enter the water. If there is a rule then the first rule of rescue is do not let yourself become a casualty, if you do then you are no help to anyone. We rely on the RYA to provide qualification schemes for launch drivers and the level 2 qualification, although basic, is adequate. I hold that qualification and the more advanced Safety Boat qualification, both with coastal endorsements. The Safety Boat qualification is aimed at people who provide safety cover for dinghy sailors and does not help much for providers of safety cover for rowers. RYA level 2 Powerboat, frequent practice in driving, and quite a bit of common sense are all that is needed to support rowers.

British Rowing does not make safety rules but does provide advice and guidance, mostly in [RowSafe](#). Clubs are expected to make their own rules, based on this guidance and their own assessment of risk.

I am familiar with the launches you describe (Orange "Jaffa"). It is fairly easy to recover a conscious person into one as the sides are rounded and they have their intrinsic buoyancy. If the person being rescued has climbed onto the hull of their own inverted boat then it is easy to recover them into the any launch. This is much easier than trying to recover a person from the water.