



BRITISHROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

November 2021

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Defibrillators can save lives

After a Head race, a rower collapsed during the crew debrief. He lost consciousness and was unresponsive. The first aiders and some doctors at the boathouse called an ambulance, CPR was administered and the club defibrillator was used within approximately 1 minute of the collapse. The rower had regained consciousness by the time an ambulance arrived and was taken to the local hospital.

The club chairman subsequently reported that *the rower was one of our fittest masters rowers and indeed usually rows at stroke to drive the crew on. No-one should fool themselves that they are too fit to have a heart attack.*

The same rower had had an attack before, more than 10 years ago. On that occasion we had to rely on the ambulance to bring an AED as we didn't have one then. It was 13 minutes before the AED was applied then, although it was still effective instantly. On this occasion, we had an AED and it was attached within a minute.

There was a host of members who helped indirectly by communicating with, and guiding, the emergency crews in. However, there were five of us directly involved in the 3 or 4 minutes after he collapsed, three doing hands-only CPR and two attaching and driving the AED. Of those five people, four are BR Level 2 coaches including all of those who performed the CPR. We knew what to do because we had attended the first aid training.

The final comment I would make is about confidence. I was operating the AED. As it is a semi-automatic model, I had to press the button to apply the shocks. I have no medical training other than the coaching related first aid courses. I think it is important for people to hear that I had absolutely no doubts at all about doing so. And whilst it happened to fall to me to do it, I am equally confident that the others would similarly have pressed the button without any hesitation. Once attached, the AED manages the whole process including coaching you on the CPR, tests the patient by measuring precisely what the heart is doing, and gives you complete confidence to do the right thing when asked.

AEDs are absolute magic, and every club should have one and of course hope to never use it!

2021 RowSafe update

It is planned to issue the next revision of RowSafe in April 2022. Please help by suggesting items that should be revised. Please consider whether there are any:

- New topics that should be added,
- Existing topics that should be removed
- New detail that should be added
- Extraneous detail that should be removed

Please write to me at safety@britishrowing.org. Thanks

Incident Reports in November

Coaches should keep a good look-out too.

A coach was concentrating on the crew being coached and did not notice a 1x approaching from ahead. The 1x was partially swamped by the wash of the coaching launch. This happened around dawn and the lights on the 1x were not particularly bright. Please take extra care when coaching to keep a good lookout in all directions.

Lights on boats

There have been several reports of boats being afloat in the dark without lights or with lights that are not sufficiently bright. Please check your lights before you go afloat and make sure that they are working correctly.

Remember the navigation rules

There was a collision in which one crew claimed to be on the "racing line" during an internal club time trial and expected the other crew to move out of their way. It was pointed out that the "Racing Line" is not an alternative to navigating according to the navigation rules. The overtaking crew should know that "any vessel overtaking any other shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken". The fact that the crews were engaged in a time trial is no excuse.

Back to basics

In one incident, rowers in a 2x let go of the blades and capsized. In another incident, the last person to get out of an 8+ stood up but nobody was holding the riggers; the boat rocked and he fell into the water. In a similar incident with a 2x, both rowers fell into the water. There was another incident where a 4- and an 8+ collided head on due to 8+ being on the wrong side of the waterway; a similar incident occurred at a different location. Please remind rowers to remember the basics.

Learn to multi-task

A collision between a 2- and a 1x, that caused some boat damage, occurred because a rower "was all over the place concentrating at the time on my technique and lost awareness of my position on the river". Please learn to multi-task.

Help with lookout

Two 4x+s both drifted towards the centre of the waterway and collided head-on. Both boats were said to be in the blind spot of the other cox. Both boats were damaged. Please remember that if a cox cannot see where she or he is going then they should ask a member of the crew to look ahead and tell them whether it is clear to proceed.

Take care when overtaking

Two 1xs, from different clubs, were both overtaking clubmates also in 1xs when travelling in opposite directions (so there were four 1xs across the waterway). The overtaking 1xs collided head on.



Think about security too

An incident involved two Burglars who entered the club by climbing around a fence. They broke the chain holding the launch and its engine to the bank, made off with the launch and then removed the engine. The launch was left to float down the canal. They then came back and broke a bike lock to steal a bike. Parts of these have been recorded on CCTV. The launch was recovered using another launch, the theft was reported to the Police. This is the fourth outboard to be stolen from the club.

Take care with boats on land

A 4+ was being carried into the boathouse in an erratic manner, not following the commands of the cox. The cox was hit on the head by the stern, requiring medical attention at A&E. The cox suffered headaches for over a week, missing both rowing and study time.

Take care when strapping boats to trailers

The trailer was flagged down on a motorway when returning from competition. A piece of boat had fallen off, it appeared that the bungee cord securing the bow of the single had failed or become detached. In future the club will use self-gripping ties rather than bungees for securing 1xs.

It is all about behaviour (again)

During a break in a junior indoor training session, two rowers began to throw a 4kg medicine ball to each other. The coach instructed them to stop but another rower was accidentally struck on the head by a medicine ball. This rower was taken to hospital, as a precaution, and discharged the same evening. The injured rower was monitored for the next 48 hours at home and had two days off school. Please take care when supervising juniors, and everyone else.

Rescue and Coaching Launches

There was a question about the designation of rescue and coaching launches following comments in the Irish Marine Casualty Investigation Board's ([MCIB report](#)) that was summarised last month. My response was that during normal outings, rowers in trouble tend to be rescued by whatever boat is closest. This was evident in the recent incident with a quad summarised in [last month's report](#). If the rowers do as they are trained and climb on top of their boats then it is usually easy to transfer them into the launch; it is not so easy when they are bobbing about in the water.

There was also concern about having an extra person in each launch to assist with rescue. The response was that I worry that if we did advise that clubs always have an extra person in the launch then this would reduce their rescue capacity.

The situation is different during competitions where boats can be designated as "Rescue Boats" and appropriate boats used for this purpose. However, even in these circumstances, all launch drivers know that the safety of human life is paramount and they will come to the aid of anyone who needs it, whatever the circumstances.

Launch Capacity

There was another comment following the [MCIB report](#), this related to the desirability of having larger launches with sufficient capacity to rescue the number of people likely to need to be rescued. The report recommends that the club reviews the “capability and suitability” of its safety boats. There was also concern, in the report, about having a person in the launch, in addition to the driver, to assist in the event of a rescue.

My response was that, in real life, rescue capacity is a matter of kilograms rather than number of people. I expect that a launch rated for 4 people could carry one adult and four 12 year olds (as in the incident in Ireland). I know that this is one less than is desirable but all that is needed is to take the rowers to the nearest place of safety.

The problem with the launch in the Irish incident was not its capacity but the fact that it could not be in two places at once. The coach chose to leave the casualty whose hair was trapped in the rigger, so that he could go and rescue someone else who had drifted downstream. If he had had a knife, as all good launch drivers do, then he could have cut the girl's hair and released her and then gone looking for the other casualty. Not carrying a knife was the real issue.

“Tin Fish” are so ubiquitous that I doubt that, whatever I do, clubs will scrap them and buy large RIBs. They can be very effective if well handled. If rowers who find themselves in the water do as they have been trained to do and climb onto their (sometimes inverted) boats then it is relatively easy to help them into the launch. If they are bobbing about in the water then it is not so easy.

On some waterways where there are many rowing boats, there are also many launches. Many come to help when needed. Had this not been the case then the incident of the boat broken across a mooring buoy (reported last month) could have been more serious.

Hair Length

There was a question in response to the October report about the length of rowers' hair. This followed the publication of the [MCIB report](#) into the incident at Limerick. I had previously written that:-

It is not prudent to provide safety advice until the results of these investigations are known. However, any rower with long hair may find it helpful to wear their hair in a “bun” or “top knot” as shown in the photo opposite. This style has the additional advantage of keeping the hair under control and out of the way so that it does not obstruct the rower's vision.

The question was:-

Now that the results of the investigation are known should British Rowing not be making firmer recommendations? I would note that British Gymnastics makes it very clear that there must be no loose hair below collar length. And if its longer than that then it must be securely tied up i.e. a bun. Long plaits are not allowed. Should we not be saying the same. This of course applies to all rowers equally regardless of gender.

My response was that there is always a temptation, in the aftermath of any incident, to draw quick conclusions and make recommendations immediately. I tried to avoid this temptation but made a strong suggestion that rowers with long hair tie their hair up in such a way that it will not introduce a hazard. That is as far as I thought I could go at that time.

The MCIB report contains the following:-

4.5.3 Hair entanglement. The Quad's female crewmembers had their hair tied back, Rower No.3's hair was tied up in the form of a ponytail. When the Quad capsized and Rower No.3 entered the water her hair became entangled in the rowlock and trapped the Rower under water. The Club's Health and Safety Policy, Rowing Ireland Safety Manual or Safety Policy, the Code of Practice Chapter 8 'Rowing Boats', or FISA Minimum Guidelines for the Safe Practice of Rowing makes no mention of rowers hair length or safety issues related to rowers hair length and it can be deduced that in the context of rowing that entanglement of a rowers hair in the equipment mounted on a rowing boat is an unusual type of event. Despite this, the length of hair, albeit tied back in a ponytail, was the cause for the Rower's entrapment in the Quad and therefore a causative factor of her subsequent injuries

The coach subsequently stated that:-

At no time was Rower 3's hair ever in a Ponytail before or during the accident. This is completely inaccurate. At no point in the previous draft report or within any of submissions received by MCIB did anyone ever state that Rower 3's hair was tied up in a ponytail.

I do not think that it matters whether the hair was in a ponytail or not, it was waist length and free.

I now feel that it is now wholly appropriate to provide further guidance and advice on hair length and the control of long hair as you suggest and was planning to do so at the next revision of RowSafe (due to be issued in April 2022).

Please understand that we issue guidance and advice, we do not make rules for the safe operation of rowing clubs and competitions. Safety at clubs remains the responsibility of clubs and their members. Safety at Competitions remains the responsibility of their organisers and competitors.

There has been a suggestion that the control of long hair be included in the rules of racing. However, this would put an excessive load on umpires who would have to judge whether the hair is too long and whether it is adequately restrained. What would they do if a rower's hair became loose during the race?

I feel that this matter, and all other rowing safety matters, are best dealt with using advice and guidance. I feel that we can rely on the good sense of the rowing community to follow advice and guidance and that this is a better approach than directing people to comply with rules. This avoids the temptation for people to try to find clever ways to circumvent rules.

Backstay Rationale

There was a request to explain the reasons for the advice in section 7.1 of RowSafe, and in the Safety Alert on [Backstays](#) that:-

"The forward port and starboard rigger on all boats, other than single sculls, should be protected by a backstay".

There was also a request to explain the type of incident that this would protect against.

This advice was issued by British Rowing in June 2013; it is still available [here](#).

The genesis of this advice was a head on collision between an 8+ and a 4x, both training at race pace. I think it was the 4x that was fitted with wing riggers but no backstays. This impacted on the spine of a rower at bow in the other boat causing a fractured spinal vertebrae.

This topic has previously been covered in Monthly Reports for May, June and July 2021, January, July and September 2020, April 2019 and October 2018. There is an archive of recent Monthly Reports [here](#).

The backstay can spread the effect of the impact over a wider area and will also tend to push the rowers body away from the other boat. Conventional wing riggers can have the opposite effect. The bending of the backstay can also absorb some of the energy at impact.

It is worth noting that backstays are fitted to all GBRT boats. Backstays help to make the boat go faster (as well as being safer for the reasons described) because they reduce pin deflection in the drive phase of the stroke.

The advice on the fitting of backstays does not apply to single sculls. The force of the impact depends on impact velocity and many other parameters. One of these parameters is the [rotational moment of inertia](#) about the vertical axis through the centre of gravity of each boat.

The rotational moment of inertia for 1x is comparatively small because most of the mass is concentrated at the centre of gravity (the scullers body). However in a 2x, the moment of inertia is proportional to the mass of each rower multiplied by the square of the distance between them. This is considerably bigger than that for a 1x and the effect is even more pronounced in larger boats.

Safe Disinfectants

I was asked to suggest an anti-viral disinfectant for use on boats and blades that will not damage aquatic life. I replied that my club rows on a reservoir that is also a fishery for fly fishermen. We have to be very careful about what we use for cleaning and disinfecting equipment.

We use Virkon Aquatic tablets; they are used in fish farms so are safe for aquatic life. You can buy them from Amazon, see [here](#). They are easy to use, you just dissolve one tablet in 500ml of water and spray it onto surfaces and allow it to dry.

Risk Assessment for rowing in the dark

There was a request for advice on the factors to be included in a risk assessment for rowing in the dark. The response was:-

The issues that I would take into account are:-

1. Is there enough light, from streetlights, etc., for rowers to be able to navigate safely over the stretch of water that they are likely to use. Are they likely to hit the bank or other obstructions because they did not see them. Lights on boats do not help, they are only there so that other people can see the boat.
2. If anyone does row in the dark what would happen if they got into trouble and needed assistance? Would anyone else see them? Would they be able to climb up the bank? Is it necessary to have another adult afloat with them? Please assume that children will not be able to assist adults, this is both a safety and safeguarding issue.
3. Are there any personal safety issues? Antisocial behaviour against rowers is not uncommon; it usually takes the form of stone throwing or dropping items from bridges. Is this an issue at where you row?
4. Do people fish when it is? Is this a risk? Will it be difficult to see someone fishing and avoid them in time? Is it likely that a rower could become entangled in fishing gear?
5. Are there any other activities on the waterway that could pose a risk to rowers?

Use of Lifejackets and Buoyancy Aids

A member of the public contacted British Rowing to say that some of our residents have expressed concern about the lack of buoyancy aids along this part of the river. We have witnessed kayakers, rowers and paddle-boarders capsize.

It was pointed out that rowers do not usually wear lifejackets or buoyancy aids. Lifejackets and buoyancy aids are bulky and tend to get in the way when rowing.

Rowers are coached that, if they fall in, they should stay with their boat and treat it as their liferaft. They should then climb on top of their boat and use their hands to paddle to safety. This training is shown in a video on YouTube [here](#).

It would be very difficult to climb onto a boat when wearing an inflated lifejacket and it would be fairly difficult when wearing a buoyancy aid. Lifejackets and buoyancy aids are generally available in rowing clubs and would be provided to anyone who wants to wear one, or whose parent wants them to wear one.

We often say that rowing is a sport that happens on the water and not in the water. On the odd occasions when rowers do capsize then they usually get no more than cold and wet. They suffer no serious consequences.

Weil's disease in Nottingham

My colleague in British Canoeing wrote to say that they have had three serious cases of Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) on the Trent at Holme Pierrepont. These resulted in paramedics being called, liver and kidney disease and four days in hospital, etc. I shared our [Safety Alert on Weil's](#) disease with my colleague.

I also wrote to the Regional Rowing Safety Adviser for this region asking him to notify the local clubs and, in particular to inform a cox who had entered the water.

2021 Safety Audit

I mentioned last month that the Regional Rowing Safety Advisers (RRSAs) decided that they would no longer accept responses that a topic was "to address" if that topic had been in that state for some years. Someone wrote to ask what would be the consequences of a Safety Audit not being accepted by a RRSA. The response was that the consequence would be the same as if the audit had not been submitted and the club would be suspended from BROE. If a club is making progress and has addressed some or most of its issues then I would expect that the RRSA would look kindly on the club. This is a matter for each RRSA to decide.

Rower Development Guide

The rower development guide uses quizzes to impart and check knowledge on several topics including safety. The safety quizzes are largely based on RowSafe. The final versions of these have now been completed and they were reviewed and approved.

Towing driving licence requirements are about to change

In previous reports I described the changes to licence requirements for drivers towing trailers that government has announced that it will introduce in autumn 2021. Last month I wrote that these new rules will come into effect from 15 November 2021. The government has since announced that "The rules about what you can tow did not change on 15 November 2021. The change will be introduced at a later date, and as soon as possible." There is further information [here](#).

Home International Regatta

The Competition Rowing Safety Adviser Job Description for the Home international Regatta was reviewed and a few comments were made.

Coaches being sued

The following question was received:-

I have been thinking about 'who is a coach? I think this important because particularly in the light of recent incidents where people are getting sued. When does a 'helper/volunteer' at the club take on the mantle of coach and render themselves responsible AND liable. I imagine that in most clubs there is a spectrum ranging from a full blown coach in charge of a junior session to a non-qualified uninsured person who takes out a crew.

(This contains a reference to a possible claim for compensation following the incident in Ireland.)

The response was that English civil law is based on what is "reasonable" or what a "reasonable person" would consider to be "reasonable". If a person exhibits reasonable care for others and has reasonable skill in doing so then it is difficult to see how a claim for any damages that do occur could succeed.

There is also an issue about what is "reasonably foreseeable". If harm is caused by an event that is not reasonably foreseeable then a claim will not succeed. It does not matter whether the event was not foreseen. This is more about whether the event should have been foreseen.

If one person is helping another, or a group, to learn to row, or improve their rowing or is simply looking after them while they are rowing then I believe that this person owes a duty of care to those rowers taking into account what is reasonable. To that extent they are coaching.

Membership of British Rowing provides member to member insurance. I expect that helpers would feel more comfortable in their supporting role if they had the benefit of this insurance. Please encourage them to become members.

Coach membership of British Rowing provides professional indemnity insurance. This level of membership costs the same as the standard Row membership (£32 pa currently), and is available to anyone who has a British Rowing coaching qualification. It is also available to others who are endorsed by their club. The endorsement form can be found [here](#).

If you are, or one of your members is, concerned that they are exposing themselves to a personal liability when helping other rowers then they may feel more comfortable in having Coach membership. In that case they should discuss this with the club.

Safety Alert - Avian Flu

There has been an outbreak of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in the West Midlands and in Wales and this appears to have infected some wild birds. A Safety Alert was issued and is included with this report. Please avoid handling any dead birds that you find as their bodies can contain a variety of zoonotic diseases. If you do have to remove them then avoid skin contact and practise good hygiene.