



BRITISHROWING

HRSA Monthly Report

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents in June

Double Fatality at a Rowing Club

Despite a bad weather forecast, four juniors were practising in 4+ boat around 4.30 in the afternoon. Suddenly a storm hit with a wind speed of 90 kmph and the boat capsized. Rescuers reached the boat in 4 - 5 minutes but they managed to save three crew members. The police recovered two bodies about 3 - 4 hours later. This is the first time in the club's 92 year history that anything like this has happened.

The club recently provided further classes on capsize and recovery using information provided by British Rowing.

This incident occurred at a well-established, well-run and well-resourced Rowing Club in India. I visited the club in November 2018 and described that visit in a Monthly Report at that time. This information is reproduced in Appendix I.

Further information and training material has since been provided.

Capsize of a gig

A pilot gig was caught by a breaking swell at the mouth of an estuary, broached and capsized. Several of the crew of junior rowers aboard were trapped beneath the inverted boat when their auto-inflation lifejackets inflated. They were able to survive in the air pocket inside the boat, however, this is a small, dark, cold, wet and scary place. They were soon rescued by the event safety boat and harbour authority launch assisted by the umpire boats. All crew recovered from water and accounted for within 5 minutes. The boat was towed ashore.

This incident has been discussed with the CPGA Safety Adviser and advisers from the CPGA. As a result a Safety Alert has been produced and is circulated with this report. The Safety Alert explains the circumstances in which manual-inflation lifejackets are preferred in wide-beamed rowing boats such as gigs. They are preferred in circumstances where it is unlikely that a wearer will become unconscious.

Expect the unexpected

There have been incidents involving many different types of craft. These incidents include:

- collision with a row of pedalos
- collision with a single handed sailing dinghy. The dinghy suddenly gybed and accelerated, the helm's vision was obstructed by the sail.
- collision of an 8+ with tourist rowboat
- collision of another 8 with a paddleboarder
- collision with hired motor boat driven by children

Keep a good lookout and anticipate then things will not happen suddenly.

Take care to learn from the misfortune of others

It is gratifying to see that the lessons learned from some incidents are recorded in the incident reports. For example, in an incident where a 4x+ capsized when it was being pushed off a pontoon, the report included the following learning points:-

- Improve member and cox knowledge and handling when pushing off fine boats without support from the pontoon.
- Provide guidance material,
- Where appropriate restrict outings to stable boats only.

In another incident, a 2x doing a 1000m time trial, collided with a large passenger boat that suddenly slowed and turned and instead of passing through the middle of a bridge to avoid two motor cruisers travelling in the opposite direction. This resulted in the 2x being squashed between the bulk of the passenger boat and the side of the bridge.

The lessons to learn from this were:

- don't put your safety at risk in the pursuit of an objective no matter how much adrenaline is pumping through your body;
- when you are catching up with a large vessel and you don't know whether they have seen you, simply stop;
- don't presume a vessel will follow the course they are on or maintain the same speed;
- double check just how many cruisers there are on the river at any one time, and don't make presumptions unless there are clear sight lines;
- keep looking over your shoulder as you move into a restricted area of the river where room to manoeuvre is limited;
- if going at speed recognise you will quickly come up to a slower vessel, literally in 3 - 4 strokes.

In another incident the gate was not adequately secured and opened leading to a capsize. The learning point identified in the report, and shared with club members was:-

- to ensure all gate levers are fully seated before being tightened as the thumb screw has a recess that tightens over the gate.

In another incident a 4x collided with a stationary Dragon Boat. The learning point identified in the report was:-

- other water users may be stationary and silent so extra vigilance is required in bright sunny conditions where there are patches of deep dark shadows.

Please remember that *“Smart people learn from their mistakes. But the real sharp ones learn from the mistakes of others”* and *“You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself”*.

It is not just your boat that you should check

A launch was being lowered down a ramp into the water when using a restraining rope. The rope had started to fray slightly but then snapped allowing the launch and trailer to enter the water. Both were recovered by club members. There was no damage to equipment or injury to people. A new rope has been obtained and this will be checked prior to each use.

Take care to be more considerate of others

There were two incidents in which rowers in a 1x were determined to pursue their objectives whilst expecting others to make way for them.

In one incident a 4+ was warming up at a slow pace and a sculler was performing a race pace piece and was not looking behind him with no spotter to look out for him. He was warned to take a look when the 4+ spotter noticed and he held up hard. He then began to shout at the novice crew and tried to undertake on the inside of the 4+. He eventually rowed past and then when he came back around he continued to be aggressive towards the crew and the spotter and when asked to please look behind him in future he actively refused saying it was everyone else's job to warn him.

In another incident, in a different city, a 1x had an outing with their coach on the bank. Another 1x was following. They both rounded a corner with sufficient distance between each other. Along the straight, the following sculler started to get closer, but not less than two lengths. The leading sculler crossed at the crossing point and noticed the other sculler making a push into the corner and closing the gap. The following sculler was regularly looking over their shoulder. The leading sculler held to their line as it rounded the corner. However, the following sculler kept gaining with their bow ball tracking the stern of the leading sculler with no attempt to hold back or to go around. The following sculler continued to push until its bow rammed the stern of the leading sculler. The following sculler accused the leading sculler of not getting out of his way.

Please understand that the COLREGs require that the overtaking vessel keeps clear of the vessel being overtaken and not the other way round. Please be considerate and respectful of other water users.

Take care around motor boats

It is that time of year when more people start to have fun again in motor boats. Unfortunately they sometimes show lack of skill, care, attention or just act stupidly. For example:

- an 8 was “buzzed” by drunken youths in a RIB. The 8 managed to power away from the RIB.
- a motor launch travelling in the opposite direction performed a sudden U turn ahead of a 2x
- a barge pulled away from a mooring without looking,
- a large passenger vessel reversed towards a 1x
- a narrowboat pulled out in front of a 1x causing a collision (see damage opposite)
- an old couple in a borrowed or hired canal boat were driving on the left and collided with a 1x who had sought safety close to the bank.

Please be ready for strange things to happen.



Take care of rowers with epilepsy.

A junior rower, known to have Epilepsy controlled with medication, was in a 2x. His partner saw him collapse, release his blades and turn his head sideways and upwards - he was having a seizure. He then slumped backward and sideways with his upper body and head going into the water. His partner immediately started shouting for help and tried to keep the boat from capsizing. A 4+ immediately came to assist and one of the crew entered the water to help get the casualty's head out. A kayaker was also nearby and joined the group to help stabilise the rowing boats.

The first 999 call was made at about four minutes after the incident started. Two rowing club launches arrived at the scene moments later. One launch took control of the 2x and they assisted the casualty. The casualty was lifted into the launch which then sped directly to a rowing club slipway as this was the nearest landing spot. The casualty was carried up the slipway to a dry area where he was immediately laid into the recovery position - at this point the casualty was breathing but was unconscious. The first of the ambulances arrived within 3 - 4mins of arriving on the slipway.

The rescue was exemplary but please take care with rowers known to have epilepsy. Please read the British Rowing guidance on [Rowing and Epilepsy](#).

Look out for swimmers

There was an incident, reported by a swimmer, in which a 2x rowed through a group of three swimmers. The bow was reported to have passed within 4 inches of one of the swimmers heads. It is also reported that the rowers claimed that they had not seen the swimmers as it is really difficult to see ahead as they were travelling backwards even though the swimmers were all using high viz tow floats.

Please understand that it is not acceptable to continue rowing unless you are sure that the water ahead is clear. If you are not sure then you must stop.

Buoyancy aids v. Lifejackets for coxes

There was a question about whether it is better for coxes to use Buoyancy Aids or Lifejackets.

The response was that as a general rule, lifejackets are better than buoyancy aids because they provide about three times as much buoyancy.

However, buoyancy aids are permitted for coxes in stern loaded boats but not in bow loaded boats. Coxes in bow loaded boats must use manual inflation lifejackets. They must not use buoyancy aids or auto inflation lifejackets. The reason is quite simple, if the boat capsizes, and they do, then the buoyancy provided by a buoyancy aid will push the cox upwards and tend to trap them in the boat. If they were to be wearing an auto inflation lifejacket then this effect would be more extreme and the inflation of the lifejacket could also trap them in their seat.

Working with the CPGA

There have been extensive discussions with my counterpart at the CPGA, the Harbour Master where this incident occurred and experts within the RNLI, following the incident where a gig capsized and some of the crew were trapped under the inverted hull (see above). This has resulted in a Safety Alert on the type of lifejacket that is preferred in wide-beamed rowing boats where there is an entrapment risk in the event of a capsize.

This advice applies to users of all types of wide-beamed rowing boats used on open water, such as Surf Boats, St Ayles Skiffs, Cornish Rowing Association Flashboats, Ahoy cutters, Celtic Longboats, Skiffs, Skerries, Thames Waterman Cutters, Whalers, etc.

Please remember that although capsized and swamped wooden gigs do float, they do not provide sufficient buoyancy to keep their crews afloat. This is demonstrated in the photo opposite of a gig that capsized in a previous incident.



It is for this reason that I would recommend that everyone in a gig (or similar wide beamed rowing boat) on open water should wear a lifejacket.

There was a suggestion that the rowers had their feet tied into the boat. This is not the case but they were using rope strops for the feet so that they did not fall backwards from the thwart at the end of the drive phase of a stroke. This configuration is shown in the photos opposite.



If the boat adjustments are correct for each rower, and if the rowing technique is correct, and the rower is sitting in the correct place in the seat, then this should not be necessary.

How to avoid wild swimmers

There was a request for information on how to avoid wild swimmers following an incident (see above). The response was to make reference to comments in my July and August Monthly Reports (both are available [here](#)). The advice was to make sure that you keep a good lookout.

Is it OK for recreational rowers to use damaged shoes?

Some members of a recreational squad have been discussing how much damage should be tolerated in a club shoe before it is replaced. (Assuming that the heel restraints are in good order and set to the correct length.) They doubt a replacement would be needed if it was a simple scuff. However, there is a huge range of other damage that may or may not merit replacement. I was asked for information that may help with this?

The response was that it does not matter whether the shoe is in a "best boat" or a recreational boat, all rowers have the right to be safe and to use good equipment.

If the condition of the area around the attachment point of the heel restraints is damaged, or has deteriorated, to the extent that the shoe may break if pressure is put on this point then the shoe should be replaced. Similarly if the material of the heel restraints have deteriorated then they should be replaced.

If the attachment point of the heel restraint to the boat is weak then this should be fixed.

If the external sole of the shoe has broken or weakened to the extent that the shoe may break if put under serious pressure then the shoe should be replaced. .

If the attachment points of the shoes to the stretcher are loose such that the shoe may become detached from the stretcher then they should be tightened. If they have deteriorated to the extent that this is difficult then the shoes should be replaced.

If the shoe has deteriorated to the extent that it is uncomfortable to wear then it should be replaced or, perhaps, repaired.

Shoes and feet vary in size and nobody should be expected to row in shoes that are too small.

Much of this testing will be subjective. If you pull on something with reasonable force and it feels as if it may fail then it should be replaced.

“Innovative” navigation rules proposed at a club

A club is introducing a rule that the fastest boat should have the fastest water. In effect this means that slower crews should move towards the middle of the river to allow a faster crew to continue rowing in a straight line and pass them on their starboard side (between the slower crew and the right hand bank). In my view this is dangerous.

This idea of the fastest boats having the fastest water is contrary to the requirements of the COLREGs. It should be remembered that the club's boats are not the only users of the stretch of water. Other users would be confused by these antics and confusion leads to harm.

The idea that others should give way to the fastest boat is flawed as most people (kayakers, paddleboarders, swimmers, motor boat drivers, etc.) will not act in this way. If rowers and coxes are led to assume that others will move out of their way then they will tend to become arrogant and that will lead to collisions when they meet other river users.

If you think about who should occupy different parts of the width of the river then it seems clear that the slower users (including kayakers, paddleboarders, swimmers, etc.) are safer if they stay near the edges (banks) and faster boats move towards the centre to overtake. This is what drivers on roads have learned to do.

If we look at the COLREGs (attached), then Rule 9 (Narrow Channels) and Rule 13 (Overtaking) apply directly. Rule 9 includes the following:-

(a) A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fairway shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable.

Rule 13 includes the following

(a) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Rules of Part B, Sections I and II, any vessel overtaking any other shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken.

(d) Any subsequent alteration of the bearing between the two vessels shall not make the overtaking vessel a crossing vessel within the meaning of these Rules or relieve her of the duty of keeping clear of the overtaken vessel until she is finally past and clear.

Rule 8, Action to avoid collision, can be used to inform the movements of others. For example

(f) (iii) A vessel the passage of which is not to be impeded remains fully obliged to comply with the Rules of this Part when the two vessels are approaching one another so as to involve risk of collision.

I think that this means that the overtaking vessel (the one whose passage is not to be impeded) should steer to avoid collision with the vessel being overtaken.

Moving out towards the centre of a river is dangerous, as this is where collisions occur, and the time spent there should be minimised. It is the faster boats that are able to move out and back quickest and therefore minimise the time spent in this dangerous position.

Appendix 1 Support Previously provided to Calcutta Rowing Club

Training was provided on 22nd November 2018 to about 50 members of the Calcutta RC and the nearby Lake RC on Safety and Coaching. Most of the people present were Junior rowers but there was also a strong contingent of coaches. All reported that they could understand English.

Both Clubs row on the Rabindra Sarovar Lake in Kolkata; this is about 900 meters long; the width varies from about 200 metres to 500 metres and there are two small islands in the lake. The club encourages young people from all backgrounds to learn to row and practice rowing. Outings start 6 am and can continue till 9:00 am. There are more outings in the evenings and at weekends.

The safety training consisted of a review of the UK incident analysis and the extent to which that matches rowers' experience in Kolkata (it does) followed by videos showing: -

- The consequences of not looking ahead
- The consequences of a sculling gate not being correctly fastened
- How to check a boat prior to launch
- An introduction to the key steps in the capsize and recovery process
- Straddle and Paddle and
- Buddy Rescue

The need to adhere to the circulation plan was also emphasised by reference to a photograph of the club's circulation plan. There is one fixed to one of the boathouse doors.

The coaching training included: -

- The importance of beginner rowers adopting the correct technique
- The importance of every rower knowing what the technique is
- The Rower Development Guide
- Warm up, cool down and stretching

The presentation was well received, and the feedback was generous.