



BRITISHROWING

# HRSA Monthly Report

September 2022

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

## Two junior rowers die following a lightning strike

On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September five middle school aged juniors were rowing on Lake Fairview in Orlando, Florida when lightning struck their boat or the water nearby. This caused the 4+ to capsize.

Three of the rowers, with the aid of their coach, were able to bring the rower who needed hospital treatment and their boat to the shore. The three rowers who had suffered only minor injuries, were treated at the scene and returned to their parents. The other rower was taken to hospital for treatment in intensive care.

Divers recovered the body of the fifth rower, who was aged 13, the following day. On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September the rower who had been taken to hospital sadly died. He died on his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The cause of these deaths has not been published but the water in a lake in Florida is unlikely to be cold at this time of year. It is suspected that their deaths were attributable to the lightning strike either directly or as a result of them being rendered unconscious before they entered the water.

US Rowing has issued a statement (available [here](#)) expressing sympathy.

It is understood that although there was not a severe thunderstorm warning over Lake Fairview, that there were storms in the area at the time.

The British Rowing Guidance on Lightning is in Section 9.1 of RowSafe which states:-

*Please note that in the event of Lightning rowers are particularly vulnerable as they are often in wide open spaces where they are the highest thing around.*

- *If you are on water, get into shelter as quickly as possible; water will transmit strikes from further away. Proximity to water is a common factor in lightning strikes.*
- *Find shelter inside a large building or a motor vehicle. The inside of a car is safe as lightning will spread over the metal of the vehicle before earthing through the tyres.*

*Do not shelter beneath tall or isolated trees, one in four people struck by lightning are sheltering under trees. See the [Safety Alert on Lightning](#).*

RowSafe also advises rowers follow the 30-30 rule, this is explained [here](#) and states:-

*If the flash to bang is 30 seconds in length or less you should seek shelter. Staying inside this shelter is advised until 30 minutes past the last clap of thunder. This ensures that any distant strikes at the beginning of the storm (lightning can travel up to 10 miles), or trailing storm clouds at the back of the storm do not take anyone by surprise.*

# Incident Reports in September

## Head Mounted Mirrors

There was a near miss in which a 1x nearly collided with paddle boarders. The collision was averted due to a helpful shout from a nearby 4x. The rower in the 1x normally uses a head mounted mirror and finds it difficult to look ahead without one. He had been instructed by his club not to wear a head mounted mirror. It is understood that this is a temporary measure pending the results of further discussions in the club. The rower concerned has decided not to row in a 1x until he is allowed to use a head mounted mirror again.

It was explained that [RowSafe](#) contains the following advice:-

- *Steers should be encouraged to use head mounted mirrors or similar devices.*

There were further discussions about head mounted mirrors in which I agreed that anything that helps people to see ahead is worth having so long as they do have the best look they can fairly frequently. It appears that the ability to look ahead, by turning the head decreases with age and head mounted mirrors are particularly valuable to the aged rower.

It is also worth noting that the collision was averted by a shout from the 4x. Please encourage rowers, coaches and others to keep a good lookout for impending collisions and provide a warning in this way so that they can be averted.

## Mid River Collisions

There have been several occasions where two boats have strayed into the middle of a waterway and suffered head on collisions. These can be avoided by:-

- More careful steering
- Keeping a better look out
- Warning shouts
- Practising the emergency stop (see the video [here](#))
- Being conspicuous (high vis kit in daylight, white kit and lights at night)

See the Safety Alert on [Collision Avoidance](#)

## Coxes should keep a lookout ahead

An 8 had just increased pressure at the steady rate of 18 spm. The kayaker was ahead of the 8 with his back to the rowing boat, apparently unaware that there was a boat behind him. The cox did not see the kayaker.

The bow of the eight hit the kayak, which capsized, and the crew immediately stopped rowing and held up hard. The kayaker was not injured and was subsequently seen kayaking upstream past the boathouse.

The cox has been interviewed by the Club Rowing Safety Advisor. The necessity of taking longer distance lookouts and the need to either lean to the side or make slight turns of the bows to be sure path ahead is clear has been explained. The Club plans to ensure that all coxes learn from this incident.

## Heel Restraint fixing detached from shoe

A rower in a 2x reported that one of their feet had started to feel loose. It was later found that the heel restraint strap had become detached from the shoe. As the shoe is nearly new this is a very concerning situation, and the club has reported it to the manufacturer.



Please ensure that the attachment points of heel restraints are checked as part of the pre-launch boat checking procedure.

## Take Care on the Towpath

A coach was cycling on the towpath alongside a crew. A cyclist travelling other direction collided with coach's bike. The coach was not able to recover his balance and subsequently fell into the water between two moored boats. He then could not get back out. Another coach, club member, the other cyclist and multiple passers-by worked for around 10-15 minutes to hoist him out of the water. The coach was helped out of the water, a first aid kit was delivered to the scene, and he was helped back to the club where the wounds were cleaned and bandaged. Please take care when cycling.

## Avoiding Shallow Waters

Collisions have resulted from rowers steering to avoid shallow waters and rowing into the path of oncoming vessels. Please advise rowers to take care to keep a good lookout ahead when steering into areas when other boats can be expected to be travelling towards them. Please also advise them to take care and not run aground.

## Visibility forward from Barges

Someone wrote asking me to mention that the view forward from the steering position at the stern is severely hampered by the superstructure of the barge. This can block the vision forward for as much as 100 metres. If you think that you may be on a collision course with a barge then please take action early.

## Defibrillators

Last month's report contained a summary of the proportion of clubs that have, or have nearby access to defibrillators. It is very gratifying to find that 78% of the clubs who reported indicate that they have access to a defibrillator. Regional Rowing Safety Advisers have been asked to report how many defibrillators there are in their region. The responses so far indicate that as follows:-

Region	Number of Defibrillators
Thames London	18
WAGS	6
Wessex	14
Yorkshire	5

I am expecting further information from the remaining regions. It should be noted that in some areas, several clubs share the same boathouse and they all have access to the same defibrillator.

It is also important to recognise that defibrillators may be needed during club outings when the crew is some distance from its own boathouse. It is recommended that arrangements are made between nearby clubs for their rowers to be able to access the defibrillators at other clubs. This is a matter of simple cooperation and creating a process that benefits all the members of all the clubs involved.

## Additional means of reporting

If you are involved in an incident involving a motorised water user then please report it using the British Rowing Incident Reporting system [here](#).

In addition you may wish to report incidents on waters supervised by the Canal and River Trust (C&RT) to them. To report an incident call 0303 040 4040 8am–6pm, Mon– Fri, email [customer.services@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:customer.services@canalrivertrust.org.uk) or complete a freepost form [here](#). The C&RT is responsible for the majority of the other canal and river navigations in England and Wales.

The Environment Agency is responsible for the River Thames, Anglian waterways and the River Medway. To report an incident call 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours).

In either case, please include the name and registration number of boats involved.

## Concern about the public use of a club landing stage

A club's landing stage, and that of the next door club, are regularly used by members of the public for swimming, launching boats from and generally hanging around on. This has been particularly bad during the school holidays when the weather was good. The land between the club houses and the river is public which further complicates things.

The club has been in contact with the local council's community safety team, the British Rowing legal advice line and their insurers. The consensus was that, as a minimum, they should display signage to warn of the risk of trips, slips and falls, keep a log of regular checks to the landing stages and complete a risk assessment for use of the landing stage by members of the general public (the club already has a risk assessment relating to use by club members). The possibility of fencing off the landing stages had been raised and apart from the cost it would need to be taken down and replaced every time they use the landing stage.

I was asked whether I had any advice on the additional measures that the club could consider?

My reply was that the advice that you have had so far is to limit your club's liability in the event of someone coming to harm. The only way that I can think that you could be found liable would be if that harm was caused (wholly or partially) by a defect in the landing stage. Signs saying Private - Keep off etc. would not stop someone being injured but (like disclaimers) would provide some protection for the club. It may be best to use self-adhesive signs stuck to the landing stage or even paint your message directly onto the landing stage.

The idea of a fence is problematic because, as you say, it would inconvenience your rowers and, to be effective, it would need to be substantial. You would then be worried about people coming to harm when climbing the fence. There are two ways that fencing can be used, one to prevent unauthorised access and the other is to mark a boundary. You could use a simple plastic (red and white) chain on small posts to mark the boundary but I do not think that this would help much.

The suggestion about keeping a record (logging) checks and maintenance work is important. If this ever comes to a legal claim for compensation then it does not matter what you know to be true; the only thing that matters is what you can prove to be true. Checks should be reasonably thorough and you should invite your members to report defects. There are many problems that can occur with landing stages (you know this as you have one) but please include any rotting or weakening of the planking and supporting structure, also look for protruding screws, nails, etc. If you take action to maintain the landing stage then take photos as evidence.

Providing your landing stage is in good order, and please ensure that it continues to be so, then you cannot be held responsible (and should not feel responsible) for anyone who enters the water from it and ultimately comes to grief. Whatever harm comes to them will be seen as a "reasonably foreseeable consequence of a voluntary action". It was their action that resulted in the harm that they suffered and it is they that are responsible.

You need to take reasonable care (no more). "Reasonable" is what a reasonable person would think to be reasonable.

## Our Approach to Rowing Safety

There was a request, forwarded by our Chairman, from an American student interested in Emergency Action Planning within the sport of rowing. She was also interested in our “*mandatory incident report process for emergency incidents*” (it is, of course, not mandatory) and asked for documents on incidents. The Chairman sent her a copy of the latest Analysis of Reported Incidents. I wrote to her explaining our approach to rowing safety as follows.

In our assessment of risk, and throughout our considerations of safety, we think separately about two different concepts. We think about Prevention and about Response. We have the model of:-

Hazards - Barriers - Hazardous Events - Controls

- Hazards are things that can cause harm
- Barriers reduce the probability of a Hazard causing a Hazardous Event
- Hazardous Events are the events that cause harm and
- Controls come into effect after the Hazardous Event to reduce the severity of harm

This is explained in detail throughout [RowSafe](#), our primary safety guidance document.

You asked about Emergency Action Plans; these would be formulated from consideration of the controls whereas Safety Plans would be formulated by consideration of the Barriers. We find that if we can get the prevention (Barriers) right then there is less need to activate the Emergency Action Plans.

In the case of the fatality in Florida that I wrote to you about earlier, it is difficult to identify Emergency Actions that could have reduced the severity of harm. The same is probably true of the double fatality at Iowa State early in 2021. This incident was described in my Monthly Reports of [March](#) and [April 2021](#). In both cases it is easy to identify potential Barriers.

I mentioned the 30-30 rule for Lightning. This is referenced in Section 9.1 of RowSafe. RowSafe includes many hyperlinks, in this case it includes [this](#) link to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) website.

To answer the original request more directly, there is more information on Emergency Action Plans in sections 3.3 and 4.3 of RowSafe.

## Carrying boats on cars

I was asked whether we had any Safety Alerts or guidance on the transporting of boats on cars. The response was that we do not seem to have had any problems with carrying boats on roof racks. There is a guidance leaflet [here](#) that explains the permitted overhangs but this is all I can think of.

## Advice on what to do following a capsize

I was asked for advice from a club that is updating its safety plan for members, and a new coach has asked for clarification on what should happen following a capsize. They are aware of the need to stay with the boat, straddling it to get out of the cold water. They are not sure of the best action to take if the capsize occurs in water that is moving quickly with no rescue boats or other craft in the vicinity, is it best to make a call to the emergency services?

My response was that a rower who is sitting astride their upturned boat is in a far better position than one who is bobbing about in the water alongside their boat.

What they do next matters but it would be better to consider what they should do in preparation before they get into this position. This should be covered in your risk assessment. You may need to review your risk assessment.

It is possible that your risk assessment may indicate that rowers should not go afloat alone in areas where the tide can move quickly. In this case you could ensure that your rowers stay close together and know how to complete a buddy rescue or that they are accompanied by a launch with a driver (and crew, if possible) who can rescue them. It is much easier to climb into a launch from an inverted boat than it is when bobbing about in the water.

It is also possible that your risk assessment would determine that rowers who venture into these areas should carry a means of calling for help (e.g. a mobile phone in a waterproof pouch tied to the rower and not to the boat). VHF Marine Mobile Band radios work well too.

Both of these approaches have the potential to be effective but the one that would be most effective would depend on the particular circumstances where you row.

It is clear that it is no good a rower waiting until they are in this difficult position before deciding what to do. Safety is all about preparation. You should consider what they should do and define your safety rules accordingly.

## Capsize Drill Workshops

There was a question about the availability of Capsize Drill Workshops. The response was that during Covid it was difficult to find a swimming pool where we could hold them. As a result, the workshops have been replaced with online training that is available to British Rowing members through RowHow. The training can be found [here](#). There are two versions, one for rowers and one for coaches. This is now the prerequisite for the Level 2 Club Coach course and it is also intended for coaches who want to run capsize drills for their club and for individual rowers who want to understand what to do if they capsize.

It was also explained that we would expect a capsized rower to climb on top of their boat and straddle and paddle to safety or climb onto someone else's boat (buddy rescue) and be paddled to safety. It is important to train rowers to stay with the boat and get out of the water as quickly as possible rather than try to swim with the boat.



## Swimmers obstructing boats

I was asked the following question; Someone makes a point of swimming off the next door landing stage as we are coming in from our outing and claims that rowers have a responsibility to look out for her. The rowers do so, as they do for anyone or anything in the water but does she have a responsibility not put herself in harm's way?

The response was that I do not know what gave this person the impression that it was everyone else's responsibility to look after her. It may have resulted from the recent changes to the Highway Code that impose a duty on motorists to avoid pedestrians, etc. If the same approach were to be taken on the river, then we would be protected from motor boat drivers.

In my view, the simple logic is that everyone is expected to behave reasonably. Everyone is equally responsible for their own safety and that of others and it is not reasonable for a person to put themselves in harm's way and rely on others to react to keep him or her safe. I also checked the River Thames byelaws (available [here](#), the club is in the upper Thames), these state:-

### **General conduct**

*63 No person shall while using or while in upon or about the river or the banks or the towpaths thereof or any land of the Authority:*

...

*(e) jump into the river or onto any vessel on the river from any place including a bridge or a highway or dive or swim or bathe in the river in such a manner as to cause obstruction, nuisance, annoyance or risk of danger or injury to persons or property;*

If this person is reasonable then please reason with her. If she is not, then please ask her for her contact details so that you can report her for contravention of this byelaw.

There has been another series of incidents in the North West; these involve a swimmer who appears to swim in front of rowing boats and, in one case at least, grab the boat and hang on. I explained that this is a contravention of the City's Council Byelaws with respect to Pleasure Boats and Vessels on the River. These Byelaws contain the following:-

*33. No person shall, without reasonable excuse, upon any bank of the river or any towpath, landing stage or pontoon or whilst swimming or bathing in the river or whilst in any other vessel on the river intentionally obstruct or interfere with any vessel.*

## Information on Capsize Drills

In last month's report I explained that a school rowing coach asked about swim tests and I replied that it is better to float than swim, at first at least. She subsequently asked for directions to the Capsize and Recovery training for rowers and the one for coaches on Row How. Both are available from [here](#). There is also a British Rowing Video on YouTube [here](#).

## **Rowers with poor eyesight**

There was some uncertainty about whether a person with poor eyesight who is registered blind could row and whether British Rowing has any official guidance on members who have very poor eyesight being on the water and steering boats. It was thought that British Rowing had followed the medical reasoning of the DVLA. i.e. if you have your driving licence revoked on medical grounds then you can't steer a boat.

I explained that British Rowing does not have any restrictions on rowers with poor eyesight. The DVLA restrictions only apply to rowers with epilepsy.

## **Publishing these reports in clubs**

Someone wrote to ask whether there were any requirements for the publication of my reports within his club. I replied to say that there are no British Rowing requirements relating to my reports. Some Regions publish the report on their website, I do not know about clubs. Personally I would be happy if you did publish the report on your website or publish a link to the archive on the British Rowing website. You may wish to consider taking the parts of the report that are most relevant to your members and including them in club communications, newsletters, emails, etc.

## **Support for British Canoeing**

Several Incident Reports mentioned interactions between rowers and canoeists. This information has been shared with my colleague at British Canoeing.

One Incident Report described the cooperation between Rowers and Canoeists. The canoeists capsized; rowers helped her and her colleagues get her back into her canoe. The report contained the following:-

*A 2x was travelling on the correct side of the river and collided with a stationary kayak heading in the same direction, under the bridge. Rowers claim to have been looking round regularly but still did not see the stationary kayak. There was a discussion with the Canoe club and they all agreed to revisit the circulation pattern for canoeists and rowers and to speak with safety officers from other clubs in the vicinity.*

British Canoeing has recently appointed a "Lead Safety Officer", who can be contacted at [Safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk](mailto:Safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk)