



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

September 2024

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Award for Courage

The Royal Humane Society (RHS) award of a Testimonial on Vellum to Izzy from Windsor Girls School is the highest level of RHS award yet made to a rower and Izzy, who was 14 at the time of the incident, is the youngest rower yet to receive a RHS award. It is well deserved. The photo below shows Izzy receiving the award from Florence, the cox.



In presenting the award, Florence said *“I’m honoured to give this well-deserved accolade to a kind, brave teammate. Izzy is an exceptional rower and an amazing friend. I am so grateful. Thank you for everything.”*

In accepting the award, Izzy said *“I would like to begin with thanking every one of you who has taken the time to be here this afternoon. I am privileged to be a part of this amazing community of rowers. Although I am receiving this award for my bravery, I believe I only did what any true team member would have done. Since joining the rowing club with Windsor girls school boat club last year, rowing has become a massive part of my life, and I believe our rowing team has become less a group of people and more a team of friends. The sense of togetherness between us girls is evident in every training session; every regatta; every time trial. The relationship I have with you girls is what keeps me rowing and why I love this sport as much as I do.”*

Next, to the parents who supported us on the day, and those who continue to support us each and every day. Thank you for everything you do for the girls and me. In particular, I would like to say a big thank you to Josie, Dominique and Rachel. I think I speak for everyone who was involved on the day when I say you held the situation together and acted in the best possible way to support us all. Thank you for everything you do.

And to my coaches, parents and teachers who support me everyday both in and outside rowing. You have been there every step of the way to encourage me to keep challenging myself. Although no one would ever choose to have experienced something like our capsized, it has made me a stronger individual and brought our team even closer together.

To the girls who we train alongside...thank you for being so understanding. So supportive of us all. You girls make our training sessions so enjoyable and you are always there to cheer us on and carry our boat at races. Thank you.

Finally, to the girls in the boat...as I mentioned earlier, I feel we entered the race as a mere crew. However, we left Dorney lake as an awesome team. I am proud to row alongside every single one of you. Thank you all for making this club as amazing as it is. You support me during training, racing and more; I can't even put into words just how much it means to me that you girls do this. You are amazing and without you guys I'm not sure how I would have ever continued rowing.

Thank you, Florence. I can only imagine what you went through that day but the very fact you are still here. Still fighting. Clearly demonstrates your immense resilience. You work so hard for everything you do, and you are always so lovely to talk to ~~about anything bothering me.~~

Now let's just hope that next year we can win an award for rowing rather than rescue.

I would like to leave you with a quote from a member of our crew...

"You didn't come this far to only come this far.

You came this far to be strong enough to go further."

This is a summary of the incident here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-July-2024.pdf](https://www.britishrowing.org/hrsa-monthly-report-july-2024.pdf) ([britishrowing.org](https://www.britishrowing.org)).

Inquest touching the death of a rower

I have recently appeared as a witness at the inquest touching the death of the rower who was swept over a weir. The weir was situated near the middle of the river and there are no buoys, booms, barriers, or markers to prevent people from being swept over it. There is more information in my [October 2023 Monthly Report](#).

It was recommended that buoys be installed, as shown below, so that rowers, and others would be aware of the location of the weir. This was presented to the Inquest and the Coroner found my evidence very persuasive. He found that markers will make decision making easier for rowers and that a line of buoys will result in a large improvement in safety.

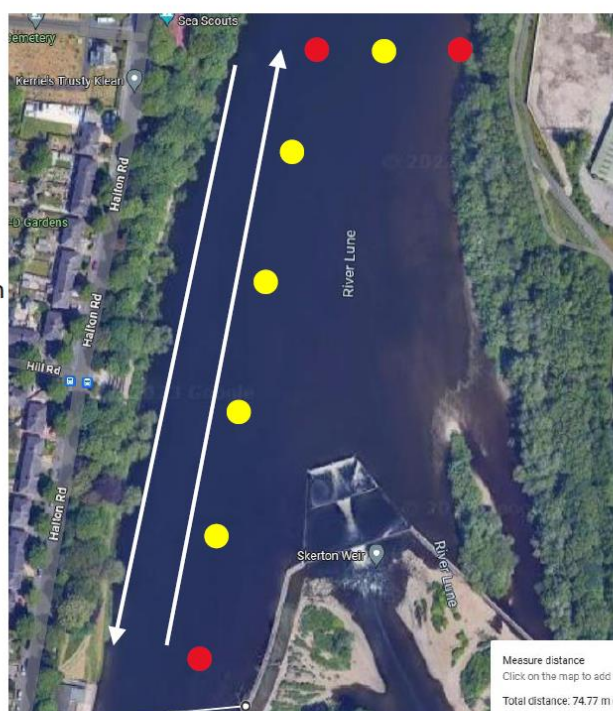
Recommended Circulation Plan

Line of buoys aligned with Sea Scout steps, distance 200m from boathouse.

Departing crews follow the line of buoys between the buoys and the bank.

Returning crews stay close to the bank.

There should be no overtaking in this transit Zone. The whole crew should row, no exercises or drills, just normal rowing.



Aligning the different coloured buoys helps rowers (when facing astern) to be more certain of their position.

Please note that the size and colours of the buoys are important, they should be chosen so that the buoys are conspicuous and so that rowers will be able to recognise where they are, in relation to the weir, even if they only see a small number of buoys.

The simple advice to all rowers continues to be “Keep well away from Weirs” and similar hazards. There is a video demonstrating weir flow in a model on the British Rowing website here [Stay Away from Weirs and Sluices - British Rowing](#).

A Safety Alert entitled “Flow over Weirs” has been prepared and accompanies this report. This explains and references the video that depicts the hazardous nature of this flow. Please print the Safety Alert and post it on your noticeboard. Encourage members to view the video using the QR Code provided. This Safety Alert will also be posted in the Safety Alert Archive here [Safety Alerts - British Rowing](#).

Please let me know (write to safety@britishrowing.org) if you have an unguarded weir in the area where you row.

Learning from the experience of others

In recent weeks I have been reviewing evidence and preparing an expert witness report for the Irish Superior Court. The incident involved a 12-year-old rower who was held underwater when her long hair became entrapped in a rigger of her capsized boat. This incident is described in great detail in the Irish Marine Casualty Investigation Board report [here](#) and has been summarised in previous Monthly Reports.

One of the key decisions in this incident was to allow an inexperienced crew to row close upstream of a hazard. They panicked and did not respond effectively to the instructions of their coach. It is not unusual for people new to rowing and young rowers to behave in this way. There are several examples in this report.

A Safety Alert, "People new to Rowing may Hesitate" has been prepared and is included with this report. This will be posted in the Safety Alert Archive here [Safety Alerts - British Rowing](#). Please forward this Safety Alert to the Coaches at your club so that they can learn from the painful experience of others.

Another issue in this case was whether the coach should carry a knife. If the coach had a knife, then they would have been able to cut the rowers hair to release her from the boat. The crew of the fire brigade rescue boat did have a knife and did release her in this way.

The British Rowing guidance in Section 7.4.1 of [RowSafe](#), Launch Safety Kits, does recommend that these kits include "a serrated safety knife with rope cutter". The use of a knife in rowing incidents was discussed at a National Rowing Safety Committee and members were able to cite incidents where they were used. Please check that your launch safety kits include suitable knives.

Incidents in September

Take care around fixed obstructions

An 8+ turned to row into the tide and attempted to row back through a line of boats. The cox then rowed off with bow four only and pointed their bows in toward the bank. The boat was not making good speed against the tide and was dragged back toward a moored boat. The 8+ became pinned against the mooring buoy at the six position. With the additional assistance of a coach, the crew were able to row around on bow side to release themselves from the buoy. The subsequent debrief with the cox included the options to use more rowers, aim further away from obstacles and, if necessary, stop to correct a course rather than trying to row out of the problem.

In another incident a rower in a 1x did not turn soon enough and became pinned against the moored boats at a pontoon. The rower was unable to push off from the boats due to the strong stream and ended up with a blade stuck. A coach nearby in a launch was able to help the rower to climb out of the boat and move it to a safer position. The rower then re-entered the boat. All rowers were reminded of the Club's rule to keep a good distance away when stopped up-stream of bridges, locks, moorings or other fixed hazards, to keep a good lookout and to take timely preventative action to avoid drifting onto the hazards.

In another incident a 4x was carried by the stream into a bridge. The collision with the bridge caused a carbon rigger to snap and the boat to capsize. All members of the club were reminded to row through the bridge before adjusting boat (e.g. foot stretcher).

Please take care when upstream of obstructions, particularly when the stream speed is high, perhaps following heavy rain.

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

Look after new coxes

An 8+ steered by a new cox crashed into a bridge, there were no other boats around. Severe damage was caused to the boat and a significant quantity of water was taken on by the bow canvas. No one was injured and a launch attended the scene immediately. The club has since determined coxes are briefed on the navigational rules of the river, new members are not to steer coxless boats, and new coxes are to be in crews with experienced steers.

In another incident an 8+ containing beginners was steering erratically and a 4x+ remained close to the bank. As the 4x+ approached, the 8+ veered across towards the bank, and nearly grounded. The 4x+ moved out, away from the bank to overtake and gave the 8+ a full boat and blades width of space. After colliding with the bank, the 8+ ignored crews around them and moved away from the bank. The 8+ overshot their manoeuvring and got their bow caught with the tide while continuing to row on one side. This brought them in contact with the 4x+. Following an initial blade clash, the bow of the 8+ grazed the 4x+ under the Bow seat. This snapped the Bow of the 8+ and left a deep indent on the 4x+.

In another incident a beginner adult crew in an 8+ was trying to land with the stream, as opposed to landing pointing into the stream. It missed the landing stage and attempted to turn but did not do so efficiently and was swept side-on towards moored boats at a pier. This caused the boat to capsize and the bow canvas to snap off. The boat (shown below) was written off. The crew climbed up a ladder to the pier to safety. The steersperson was a novice and was inexperienced in taking control of the crew and giving instructions.

Please ensure that coxes new to rowing are properly trained and adequately supervised. There are Workshops on various types of coxing on Row How here [All courses | Home \(rowhow.org\)](http://www.rowhow.org).



Take care with your shoes

A rower in a 1x hit a buoy and capsized. They were unable to free their feet despite repeated attempts, to do so. The rower was not wearing socks and the shoes in his boat were too tight. Another rower in a 1x assisted by rafting up alongside so that the rower could hold onto his boat. The rower was then assisted by a coach in a launch who was able to reach under the boat to free the rower's feet. This needed several attempts and took several minutes. Once the rower was safe the shoes were checked. This revealed that the shoes were extremely narrow, and the heel restraints were present but too long.

Keep a good lookout at all times

There have been many incidents due to not keeping a good lookout. Here are some examples: -

- Two rowers in 1xs collided going in opposite directions during a time trial. Neither capsized. The head coach addressed whole squad about the need for constant look out in such circumstances. Safety is more important than speed.
- Two rowers in 1xs were going in opposite directions both paddling at light pressure and came into contact in the middle of the river under a bridge. Both remained in their boats. Both rowers were hit in the back by the other one's rigger. One had a carbon bow mounted wing rigger which provided some protection, the other had a stern mounted aluminium wing with no back stays. They were reminded of the need to keep a constant lookout, especially when going upstream on bends. The club will consider putting back stay on stern wing rigger single sculls to provide protection.
- One 4x rowed into other 4x as they were turning.
- There was a collision as a 1x was overtook another 1x. The overtaking rower claimed to have looked but the other rower was dressed in black. The rower has resolved to look over the right shoulder not only before but during the overtaking and keep wearing hi-viz clothing.
- Two 4xs had a relatively low speed head on collision in the centre of the river at a bend. Neither bow seat sculler saw the oncoming boat.
- A rower in a stable 1x was stationary close to the bank waiting for launch wash to subside when there was a collision with the bow ball and bow blade of an 8+. The club was very sorry for this collision and will do their utmost to learn from it. All their coxswains will be briefed on improving their awareness and look out, as will their coaching team.
- Two 1xs were rowing in opposite directions in the middle of the river. They collided because their rowers did not see each other until it was too late. The sun was very bright and at a low angle which didn't help with visibility.
- There was a collision between a 1x and a 2x in a narrow section of a river due to failure by both steers to be aware of surroundings.
- There was a head-on collision between experienced rowers in a 1x and 2x. The rower in the 2x moved closer to the centre to pass moored boats. The rower in the 1x was not close to the riverbank as they came off the bend. The rowers in the 2x were looking towards the moored boats and the rower in the 1x was looking towards the bank.
- A 1x and 4x were paddling in opposite directions at relatively low speed. Both drifted into the middle of the river and collided.
- Two 2xs were rowing in opposite directions, one crew pulled to the middle to avoid a tree and the other to avoid a private pontoon. Both crews were too close to the middle. Both crews had reduced the boat speed and only blades hit the rowers and boats, there was no boat contact.
- A rower in a 1x was involved in a head on collision with a 2-. The rower in the 1x resolved to keep a better lookout, especially near crossing points.

- A 2x had a near miss with a large motorboat. The lesson learned was to ensure to continuously keep a lookout over the left shoulder as well as the right shoulder.
- A 4x and a 2- had a head on collision while training for Head racing and rowing at firm. This caused a blade on the 4x to be broken against the lower back of the bow rower of the 2- who had to take time out from training for recovery. The injured rower has been left with hopefully non-permanent limited mobility and severe back pain. All Club rowers were reminded to keep a proper lookout.

Drive your launch with care

A launch driver was seen driving a launch in a dangerous and reckless manner. The weight distribution was such that the bows were elevated and blocking the driver's view ahead.

This can be corrected by having another person in the boat positioned in the bows, or by strapping weights into the bows, or by having the driver sitting further forward in the boat.



Take extra care with your trailer

On the way back from a competition, the near side wheel bearing on a small trailer collapsed. It was being driven by a driving instructor and experienced trailer tower. Fortunately, he noticed smoke coming off the axle before it failed completely. There were no injuries nor damage to people, boats or other vehicles. The trailer had been serviced in November 2023 but had been submerged twice over its axles in floods since then. Please take care to ensure that our trailer is in good condition before using it.

Take care around sailing dinghies

There was a collision between a sailing dinghy and a 4x. The steers of the 4x thought that the dinghy was a safe distance away. The wind was gusty, and the dinghy accelerated. Sailors often assume that rowing boats are “vessels under power” and that “rowers” should give way to “sailors”. Please keep well clear and be aware that dinghies can accelerate quickly.

Capsize briefings work

A rower in a 1x, being supervised by an experienced rower, stopped to check ahead. One blade was caught by a wave and pushed underwater, and the rower lost balance and capsized while trying to rotate it out. The rower climbed on top of the boat and paddled it to shore, where other members of the club kindly helped. This was the rower's first capsize, but their club management run regular safety briefings, so although they had not previously been in this situation, they felt confident knowing how to safely get themselves out from under the boat and to shore.

Appropriate training for older rowers

I was asked for this advice by a member off a club that is having a debate about how older (60+?) Masters may need to train differently to younger masters. This is a safety issue as there have been problems with excessive exertion when people train. I asked colleagues for advice and this is the response. These are the key points: -

“A general summary would be:

- *You get slower as you age.*
- *Slow twitch muscle fibres retain their strength longer than Fast twitch.*
- *More recovery time is needed as you age.*
- *Lots of low intensity training rather than high intensity.*
- *Listen to your body and allow it to recover from injury or illness.*
- *You need more protein.”*

and

“I'm sure you've recognised in your debate that all masters rowers are different so it is all about the individual. A 60+ master could well be fitter than someone in their 40s.

A webinar on Rowing Development for Masters (presented in 2020 by Rosie Mayglothing) and other potentially interesting articles can be found here - [Rower Development: Masters Rowing - British Rowing Plus.](#)”

Swimming ability and age

I was asked by a colleague in the Royal Dutch Rowing Federation [KNRB](#) for advice on the way we manage the effects of ageing on a rowers ability to swim.

The response was that I wrote about this in my March 2024 Monthly Report here [HRSA-Monthly-Report-March-2024.pdf \(britishrowing.org\)](#) (see "Capsize training for the older rower") .

We recognise that as people get older, they may no longer be able to do what they could easily do when they were younger. One of the problems is that the people involved often do not know this themselves and will honestly tell you that they are strong swimmers.

The guidance in RowSafe explains that it is not always necessary for rowers to be able to swim. This is also explained in the March report (see "Including rowers who cannot swim"). Authoritative advice tells us that if a person falls into cold water then it is safer for them to float, until they have recovered their ability to control themselves, rather than to try to swim.

Have a look at these videos [RNLI Respect the Water \(teens\) 'float to live' \(youtube.com\)](#), [RNLI: Float to Live \(youtube.com\)](#), [How to float in water: 5 simple steps that could save your life \(youtube.com\)](#), and [The Science Behind Float To Live \(youtube.com\)](#)

Coaching ratios

There were two requests for information, one relating to launch support for junior rowers and the ratio of coaches to junior rowers.

The response was that there are two considerations Safety and Safeguarding although these overlap to such an extent that they can be considered almost synonymous. I do not normally give Safeguarding advice, but I will point people towards published advice.

As far as Safety is concerned this varies from club to club as the venues they use can be considerably different so the ratio should be determined as part of the club's risk assessment. Section 6.1 of [RowSafe](#) deals with people new to rowing.

As for Safeguarding, there is advice on Coaching Ratios in the [British-Rowing-Safeguarding-Children-and-Young-People-Policy-June-2021-2.pdf \(britishrowing.org\)](#)

3.8 Coaching Ratios

Safeguarding best practice dictates that qualified adults must always be present when children are participating in rowing and rowing-related activities, such as land training.

The number of adult's present depends on a multitude of different factors, some of which include.

- *the age, gender or behaviour of the children involved in the activity.*
- *any additional supervision or support needs the children may require.*
- *the type of activity, and the equipment required*

All clubs and coaches must carry out a risk assessment which is reviewed for each session to ensure they are assessing any additional factors that may affect the number of required coaches. This assessment should include the number of people required to supervise the activity and should take account of the remainder of this section.

Coaches working with children should ensure that they do not work in isolation, therefore there should be at least two adults available when coaching children and young people, in accordance with CPSU guidelines. This is to protect both the child, as well as the coach, especially so that, in case of an accident or injury there is always someone available to supervise the remaining children.

I do know that there should be at least two adults supervising juniors, at least one of these adults must be DBS checked. These responses were copied to my colleague the British Rowing Safeguarding Manager.

Support for Paddle UK

Information on incidents involving canoes and paddleboards continues to be shared with my colleague at Paddle UK (formerly British Canoeing).

Water Quality Data

Relevant information can be found on the British Rowing website here <https://www.britishrowing.org/sustainability/> under Storm Discharge Maps

Navigating the turn of the tide on the Tidal Thames

There have been several collisions, around high water and low water, when crews are uncertain of the direction of flow. The time of high and low water varies from place to place and can be influenced by fluvial flows during and following heavy rain.

The following advice appears on p73 of the Tideway Code ([Tideway Code.pdf \(pla.co.uk\)](#)): -

Avoiding collisions: the turn of the tide

Navigating on the turn of the tide is notoriously confusing and may lead to collisions or near misses so requires extra consideration.

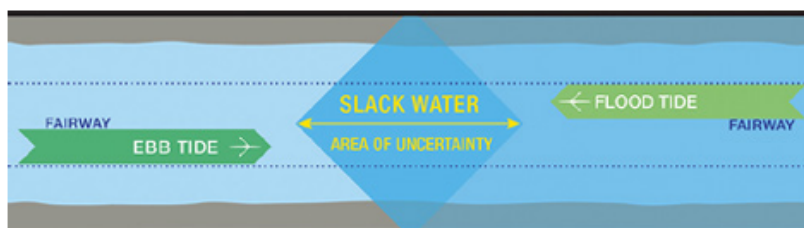
It is possible for a rowing boat to travel faster than the tidal stream is moving, so when travelling with the tidal stream rowing boats can easily overtake the changing tide.

When travelling against it, boats could easily meet the changing tidal stream as it approaches.

At the point where the tide is turning there is an obvious zone of still water, known as **slack water**. This slack water zone continually moves at the head of the turning tide and is a good indicator that steers will need to change their navigation pattern from one tidal stream to the other.

See [page 12](#) for how to check the tidal stream direction. However if in doubt:

- Navigate on the **starboard** side of the Fairway until you can be sure of the tide direction
- Observe how other crews are navigating and communicate with them about the state of the tide – it may be different where you are now to where they have just come from
- Only make changes to your navigation pattern once you are completely sure the tide has turned
- Avoid racing or doing pieces when you are unsure of the tide direction
- **KEEP A GOOD LOOKOUT**



Col Reg Rule 14

Head-on situation

- (a) When two power driven vessels are meeting on reciprocal or nearly reciprocal courses so as to involve risk of collision each shall alter her course to starboard so that each shall pass on the port side of the other.
- (c) When a vessel is in any doubt as to whether such a situation exists she shall assume that it does exist and act accordingly.

For the purposes of this regulation, rowing and paddled boats must act as power-driven vessels.

Notwithstanding the above points and other advice on this page, all vessels have a duty of care to avoid a collision (Col Reg, Rule 2).



Home International Regatta Beach Sprints Safety Documentation

The Risk Assessment and Safety Plan for this competition were reviewed and some comments were made. Overall, the quality of these documents is very high.

Capsize and Recovery training

I was asked by a school Head of Rowing for advice about the Capsize drill. The school has no swimming pool and has struggled to access any public or private off site pool time for these purposes. They have completed parental forms confirming their children's swimming capability. Pupils whose parents have any doubts over their swimming abilities can only go on the water with lifejackets. The pupils are taught the capsize drill procedures on land, verbally and with reference to equipment in person, however no simulation is provided in or on water. Would it be acceptable to carry out capsize drills in a controlled and risk assessed open water environment (such as a lake, or a shallow beach inlet of a riverbank)?

The response was please remember that British Rowing guidance no longer advises that rowers must be able to swim. The guidance in section 3.6 of [RowSafe](#) where it states that: -

"3.6. Competence in the Water

It is important that rowers who find themselves in the water do not panic and are able to respond so that they can keep themselves safe. In effect, this means that they should be able to swim or float. Floating, rather than swimming, is recommended by the RNLI, RLSS and NWSF because it tends to conserve heat and energy when in cold water.

All participants in rowing should be competent and confident in the water. Each club is expected to use its Risk Assessment to determine the capability that it requires its members to have.

It should be recognised that the ability to swim in a pool does not guarantee the ability to swim in cold, exposed waters. This is explained further in the online learning module on Cold Water and Hypothermia and the Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills. Everyone taking part in rowing should be able to:

- *Float unaided for at least five minutes*

And ideally

- *Swim at least 50 metres in light clothing (rowing kit).*
- *Tread water for at least two minutes.*
- *Swim under water for at least five metres.*

Those rowers who can only float or swim when wearing a buoyancy aid should also wear such an aid, or a lifejacket if coxing, whenever they are afloat."

There are videos here that explain this: [RNLI Respect the Water \(teens\) 'float to live' \(youtube.com\)](#), [RNLI: Float to Live \(youtube.com\)](#), [How to float in water: 5 simple steps that could save your life \(youtube.com\)](#), and [The Science Behind Float To Live \(youtube.com\)](#)

If you want to take rowers to a swimming pool (without their boats) then I feel sure that you will be able to find one that will accommodate them. Doing this must be better than relying on declarations.

There is capsize and recovery training, including videos, on Row How here [Course: Capsize Drill | Home \(rowhow.org\)](#). This may help you to deliver training to your rowers.

The decision on what is needed in each specific case is a matter for each club considering its Risk Assessment.

I do not like the idea of practising capsize and recovery in the river, particularly in view of the contamination in rivers recently. Also, it can be difficult to find a rower who gets into trouble in turbid river waters, this was the cause of the death of a rower in Zimbabwe. What is easy in the swimming pool can be very difficult in the river.