

HRSA Monthly Report

June 2018

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Incident Reports

Incident reports were reviewed (other than those of simple capsizes). Comments were made on a few and some were forwarded to others for information. Incident Reports that describe medical treatment beyond first aid and those that describe medical issues are routinely shared with the Honorary Medical Adviser.

In one incident a boat became detached from a trailer and was hit by an oncoming Heavy Goods Vehicle in heavy but fast moving, traffic. Fortunately nobody was hurt but two boats were badly damaged. The driver reports that from now on he will:-

1. Review of condition all straps and replace as necessary
2. Ensure all club members are proficient at tying on boats
3. Consider use of an additional bow ball retaining strap

This is good advice.

There have been several incidents of anti-social behaviour and violence. In one, an irate angler cast his line (and hook) over a Junior Ladies 8.

In another, junior rowers were jostled and intimidated and there was an attempt to take a launch. There was a similar incident at the same club two days later. CCTV footage has been provided to the Police who tracked down the youths.

There have been other incidents where motor boats have been used to intimidate rowers.

It is recommended that, in addition to reporting using the British Rowing Incident Reporting System, incidents of violence or antisocial behaviour on land are reported to the Police and similar incidents on the water are reported to the local navigation authority.

There has been yet another report of a rower suffering an epileptic episode afloat. The rower capsized in a 2x due to an epilepsy "absence". This has been discussed with the Honorary Medical Adviser (HMA) and there is considerable concern about rowers with epilepsy. The HMA, Dr David Zideman, who commented as follows;

This is yet another epilepsy incident and illustrates that even a simple 'absence' episode can result in a problem.

It is understood that the HMA is working on revised guidance on rowers with epilepsy and has involved the FISA medical specialists. This guidance will be reviewed by the Medical Panel.

There was an Incident Report about a crew being buzzed by a drone. The advice on the Civil Aviation Authority website (see <https://www.caa.co.uk/Consumers/Unmanned-aircraft/General-guidance/Reporting-misuse-of-a-drone/>) says "If you have any concerns about drones being used in your area, either from a safety or privacy perspective, contact your local police on 101."

In another incident, a sculler with a lower limb prosthesis capsized and had difficulty releasing herself from the boat. Further investigations will be made and information has been requested in preparation for the 2019 update to RowSafe.

In another incident, a coach was cycling at speed to catch up with an 8. He was standing on the pedals, head forward, and looking at the crew as he was crossing a bridge when his head collided with a lamp post.

He sustained severe concussion, very disorientated loss of short term memory, visual disturbances, especially with computer screens, that lasted over four weeks. He was taken to hospital and had a CT scan, this was repeated two weeks later. He was told to take three weeks away from work then to return on a reduced timetable for two weeks.

This shows the importance of coaches keeping a good lookout at all times! It also emphasises the need for coaches on bikes to wear cycling helmets. Please see the Safety Alert on Head Injuries at <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-May-2015-Head-Injuries.pdf> .

The ability to see objects ahead of the boat.

There has been an extensive discussion with a person who swims and kayaks and reports that he has had several close encounters with rowing boats. This followed from his comments on Twitter. His questions and my answers are reproduced in Appendix I. His view is that people responsible for steering coxless boats should use cap, or head, mounted mirrors to enhance their view ahead. They can look like this:-



Before recommending this, or anything like it, it would be helpful to have feedback based on direct experience of their use. Can anybody who has used them please let me know how well they work.

I have only seen one being used once and I was very impressed right up until the point where the boat hit a buoy.

Please write to me at safety@britishrowing.org if you have used a device like this, or a similar product, while rowing or sculling.

Bumps Incident

There was a serious incident at the Oxford May Bumps resulting in significant boat damage but, fortunately, no serious injuries. A meeting has been sought with the person who is both the Senior Member for Oxford University Rowing Clubs and Chair of Council for Oxford University Rowing. It should be remembered that British Rowing have jurisdiction over the safety related behaviour of its member clubs.

British Rowing Masters Championship

The revised risk assessment and safety documentation for the championships were reviewed and found to both much improved and satisfactory.

Power8 Sprints

Some input has been provided on the Circulation Plan and the Safety Plan. Further feedback will be provided on the Safety plan.

Work with the Cornish Pilot Gig Association (CPGA)

An Incident Report from a Gig Club has been forwarded to the CPGA Safety Adviser.

Competence to compete and train

There was a request for advice from a club who has a member who suffers from Parkinson's disease and was still keen to compete. The club had some reservations about his ability to do so in view of the progression of this disease. I supported the club's decision not to permit him to compete.

This discussion is summarised in Appendix 2.

Defective Throw Lines

I have agreed to attend a meeting at the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) headquarters to "assist the Chief Inspector in developing suitable recommendations to help prevent a reoccurrence" of the defective throw line incident initially reported by Warrington Rowing Club.

Safety Audit at a School Rowing Club

Bryanston School has requested a safety audit of their rowing club. The onsite phase was conducted on 5th June and a report is in preparation. The report will highlight the various good practices but will also identify some opportunities for improvement.

Other Advice

The following questions were received:

Q Are the "ARA" lifejackets, or similar still available from BR? Do you have any other suggestions?

A The lifejackets with ARA branding were sold by Getek. Unfortunately this company has ceased trading and does not have stocks of these products. I have explained this in recent monthly reports and identified some interesting alternatives. (the reports were attached) You can see these reports on the Eastern Region website at <https://www.errc.org.uk/rowing/safety/hrsa-reports/> .

Q At a recent regatta a coach expressed concern that racing was running over 90 minutes behind schedule and a number of junior crews were being held out on the water in the heat. Boating had not stopped. Officials responded that they should have taken enough water with them - they probably did for a 30 minute delay but not 90 minutes.

The checked safety and competitor instructions refer to adverse weather conditions but nothing about heat.

What guidance can British Rowing provide.

A We already provide guidance on this in RowSafe.

Section 8.2 of RowSafe deals with Sunburn, Heat Illness and Exhaustion.

Section 4.1, on Event Risk Assessment, contains the following:-

Event Officers and Organising Committees are expected to:

- Ensure that their event has completed a Risk Assessment and that this covers activities under its influence or control, both on and off the water. The purpose of the risk assessment is to identify any further barriers or controls needed to ensure the safety of everyone involved. Factors to be considered include:
- Potential hazards such as obstructions, weirs, cold or hot weather, and limited access points. There is more information about flow over weirs here.

and, in Section 8.2 we have:-

Event Officers and Organising Committees are expected to:

- Include the risks of exposure to sun and heat leading to sunburn, heat illness and exhaustion in the event's Risk Assessments.
- Provide competitors and officials with information about sunburn, heat illness and exhaustion.
- Provide First Aid facilities.
- Ensure that sufficient drinking water is available.

Hot Sunny Weather is also included in the Example Risk Management Plan in section 9.1

Appendix I – Front view mirrors

1. *Why is it OK for coxless rowers without front view mirrors to shout "If I kill you it will not be my responsibility"?*

No it is not OK; this is wrong on every level. It is not OK for rowers of any type, or at any time, to shout anything like this.

Rowers are encouraged to use sound signals to warn others of their presence, the only way that they can do this is by shouting. The basic requirements are for them to keep to the navigation rules (or "rules of the river") and to keep a good look-out. They expect others to do the same. In most cases the navigation rules are based on the International Regulations for the Avoidance of Collisions at Sea (the COLREGS). They apply directly in water that can be accessed by sea going vessels and are used as the basis for other rules. The basic steering rule is to "drive on the right". Keeping a good lookout in all directions and using sound signals are also referred to in the COLREGS.

If there were to be a collision then, depending on the circumstances, it could well be the rowers responsibility. If however the other vessel was not where it should have been according to the navigation rules then it may not have been the primary responsibility of the rower. It all depends on the circumstances. When there are collisions between boats then all the people involved have some responsibility as each has a responsibility to avoid collisions. There are, of course exceptions for moored boats.

If you look at section 1.1 of RowSafe then you will find:-

Everyone is expected to:

- Ensure that their actions both on and off the water do not put others at risk.

In the Specimen Safety Policy (1.3.1) it says:-

“We recognise that our members have primary responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.”

2. *Does British Rowing have a policy of allowing rowers to abuse others?*

No, of course not.

3. *Why is there no mention of optimising forward vision in RowSafe?*

This is a fallacy. In section 5.1 of RowSafe you will see that one of the first items mentioned is:-

Coxes and steers (including scullers) are expected to:

- Keep a good lookout at all times when afloat.

We teach people about the need to keep a good lookout. Have a look at the Collision Avoidance video, there is a link at <https://www.britishrowing.org/knowledge/safety/>

4. *RowSafe 9.4 says Everyone is expected to respect the needs of other water users, lacks broad example list of others?*

You have already mentioned the length of RowSafe, if we add lists containing many examples then it will become even longer. There is a list of examples in the first paragraph of section 9.4, this states:-

Rowing activities are affected by other water users **such as motor boat users, sailing clubs, canoe clubs and water-skiers**. It is important to know who else uses the local water, what activities they undertake and the hazards that these may present. These considerations should be incorporated into the Risk Assessment.

We have issued joint guidance for rowers and canoeists see <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Guidance-for-Rowers-and-Canoeists-on-shared-water.pdf?41e6e6>. This may also be on the British Canoeing website.

5. *Why are RowSafe risk assessments mainly based on hazards from rowers to others not from rowers to others?*

We have included risks to other water users in the risk management plans in section 9.4 of RowSafe. However, most incidents involving rowing boats do not involve other water users. Many do not even involve other rowing boats. The actions we take to prevent collisions with other rowing boats are also effective in preventing collisions with other, non-rowing boats. It would be highly repetitive if we were to list actions to prevent collisions with rowing boats and other water users separately.

We focus on prevention, it is less important who is harmed, because if the potential incident does not happen then nobody is harmed. It is more important to prevent an incident than to be concerned about who was not harmed by the incident we have prevented.

6. *If a coxless rower without forward visibility killed me what would you do?*

This is just hypothetical as I do not know of it ever happening. Most of the very few fatalities that we have had involved heart attacks, or hypothermia and drowning. All involved rowers or their coaches and none involved non-rowers. Most of the fatalities occurred to people from other countries rowing outside the UK.

However, I do happen to know that there were five fatalities in British Canoeing this winter. None of these involved rowing boats.

7. *What percentage of rowers row without forward visibility (e.g. front view mirrors)?*

We have not measured this but I suspect it is very few. I have only seen one person doing so and was very impressed right up to the point where he hit a buoy (it was soft and there was no damage). This leads me to believe that they do not work on rowers.

I issue a monthly report that is widely circulated. One region publishes it on their website (see <https://www.errc.org.uk/rowing/safety/hrsa-reports/>). I will ask readers about the extent to which these devices are used and their effectiveness. This will help us to know how to proceed.

8. *What is the target date for 100% compliance?*

Currently never.

The question shows a lack of understanding of the way in which British Rowing is organised. The explanation is too long for an e-mail but, in general, we provide advice and guidance, Clubs set their own rules.

9. *Have you engaged with your insurers on risks to others of sanctioning coxless crews without forward facing vision capability?*

Not as far as I know. I try to avoid dealing with insurance as it has nothing to do with safety. Insurance is simply a financial safety net in the event of serious loss. Safety is all about prevention, insurance is not.

10. *Is there some kind of odd culture or institutional inertia that puts that puts other rowers and other water users at risk?*

No. We all work very hard to promote rowing and our well-earned reputation as a safe sport is important to us.

11. *Do you think that requiring coxless rowing crews to have forward facing visibility should be compulsory to be a member of British Rowing?*

Constitutionally this would be difficult but even so, if this can be shown to be beneficial, and that is yet to be established, then it could be something that we recommend. We expect rowers to look ahead, as I have explained. They do so by simply looking over their shoulders. As you may appreciate, rowing is highly dynamic, all parts of the body move all the time. Having a mirror fixed to a hat, or to a rowers head, may not do much to aid forward vision.

12. *Do you think that requiring coxless rowing crews to have forward facing visibility should be help safety, and why?*

If you mean using mirrors then I am sceptical, but will try to find out, as I have explained.

13. *Some rowers use mirrors, they have never collided with me, Do they help safety?*

Thank you for that information. I do not know whether they will help in some circumstances. Once that has been established then we can proceed.

14. *Can I have a risk assessment for collision risk and impact on others by coxless boats?*

No. I think you are asking for information on the prevalence of collisions involving coxless boats. I can track the number of these collisions but this would, in itself be meaningless without having information about the relative use of coxed and coxless boats. We analyse reported incidents each year. The results are published at <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2017-Incident-Analysis.pdf> . There is information there about collisions with other water users.

It may interest you to know that this time last year, I wrote about a Safety Alert about looking out for swimmers, please find a copy attached. There are more Safety Alerts at <https://www.britishrowing.org/knowledge/safety/safety-alert-archive/> .

15. Might you please, be able to tell me cost, perhaps as a % of a typical annual RC budget of buying for coxless crews, what might become suitable forward facing vision capability? Might such a cost be acceptable in some circumstances?

Cost is not an issue. I do not know how much head mounted mirrors cost but it is almost certainly not significant compared with the other costs in rowing

16 How much harder do you think this is than in a coxed boat where there is a forward facing person?

There are problems with the ability of coxes to see directly ahead because there are usually quite large rowers sitting in front of them. Some people refer to this as the "cox's blind spot". I have been campaigning on this recently. The cox's blind spot "excuse" is not acceptable. Forward vision is probably easier and better in coxed than it is in coxless boats but it would be too easy to overestimate this. There is not that much difference.

RowSafe was recently updated to advise coxes to add "Coxes who cannot see directly ahead should enlist the help of members of their crew."

17. If there is a difference in difficulty, has this been addressed by any specific risk assessment? This point connects to the question which you number 14. If so, when and by whom and might I please have sight of it?

I think the simple answer is not as far as I know. Clubs do risk assessments for their own activities and we provide guidance and training to help them do this.

18. Has BR or another body, perhaps even a researcher, specifically asked coxless rowers if they use forward vision aids, such as mirrors or camera with screens, and what they may or may not contribute to theirs as well as third party safety?

Not as far as I know, and this is the big problem. I am not convinced that these things work for rowers. I will ask for feedback from the rowing community in my next monthly report and hope to be surprised by the response.

19. Reading the website, I am impressed that there is considerable emphasis on leadership within BR. Might club captains soon start to lead by example, and use continuous forward facing vision mechanisms (I don't want to be specific on how, but approaches might include mirrors or a forward-facing video camera with a screen for the steersman) when rowing coxless?

Thanks. Once we are convinced that they work then I can recommend them. It is not just club captains, there are many leaders in rowing clubs, they include coaches, experienced rowers, safety advisers, parents, and many others.

20. Regarding COLREG compliance in relation to rowing. Does the high, i.e. 15 mph ish, speed of rowing boats, which potentially makes collisions with them much more lethal than with craft at slower speeds, impose an extra high duty to take extra responsibility to look forward continuously?

There are lots of issues here. First most club boats do not get anywhere near 15 mph. Most boats would cover 2000 metres in about 8 minutes (about 9 mph) if they were really trying. Smaller boats are slower and bigger boats are faster. Rowing boats tend to be exempt from speed limits because speed limits inland are determined by the extent by which the wash damages banks. Rowing boats produce very little wash.

We provide lots of advice on keeping a good lookout and on being conspicuous. The Open Swimming Society does something similar (see <https://www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/am-i-safe/>) . Many more rowers now wear hi-vis tops.

21. COLREG Rule 6 on safe speed states: "Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions."

Rowers practise emergency stops and can stop in less than one boat length. This should enable them to be able to avoid conspicuous objects in the water.

There were some other questions but I was no longer willing to continue this discussion at this level of detail. The answers were:

On blade tip speed, this is quite easy to model. When the spoon (the large part at the end of the shaft) is in the water it is almost stationary. There is some slip but this is negligible. The spoon is in the water for about 50% of the time a person is actively rowing. It follows that the average tip speed for the time that the spoon is out of the water is twice the boat speed. Blades are relatively light and easily knocked out of the hands of rowers. Collisions with blade tips typically result in bruising and little more.

Objects, including people tend to be pushed aside by contact with the hull of a rowing boat. The real danger is collision with the riggers as these are hard, stiff and carry the inertia of the boat.

The real issue here is that I do not believe that mirrors would be effective on rowing boats. I will conduct my own survey, as mentioned above, and will be guided by the results.

Appendix 2 – Fitness to compete and fitness to train

The request came from a club masters vice-captain with responsibility for entries to events. He had recently deferred an entry to a men's double scull on the basis that he did not believe one of the crew was safe to compete.

The crew member in question suffers from Parkinson's and his condition has regrettably deteriorated over the past year, this however was not the reason for deferring the entry. This decision was based on the members performance when training (there is more detail)

The entry was deferred based on the performance and not on the fact that the member has Parkinson's although this underlying illness is clearly a factor in his current performance.

Yesterday the said individual collapsed into unconsciousness on the landing stage whilst talking to other crews who were boating, (I did not witness this incident which was reported by another club management member).

The individual in question is not classed by the club as a disabled athlete and is not part of or answerable to our adaptive rowing section. He enjoys full and unrestrictive access to the clubs land and water facilities.

I would be grateful if you could offer an opinion :

- Am I being unreasonable in deferring (not refusing) this entry without the requested evidence.
- What is my and the clubs liability if this crew is allowed to race and a serious incident occurs and no such verification is undertaken, does the buck stop with me?
- Is this simply a matter to be determined by the individual concerned whether he is fit to compete or does the club have the final authority?
- The club does not classify him as a vulnerable adult.

The response was:

I think that you have come to the only conclusion that makes any sense.

I checked RowSafe in the hope that we had addressed this issue. We have not done so explicitly but section 4.2 contains the following under participating clubs:-

Officers of participating clubs are expected to: *Take action, as appropriate, to ensure that nobody is exposed to substantial or intolerable risk.*

This appears in the introduction to section 8.6 of RowSafe. *People who are not feeling well, recovering from an infection, or suffering from a chronic condition should take care when exercising. It is important to seek medical advice in these situations*

Rowing is a team sport. Rowers should be encouraged to look after their fellow rowers. If they look unwell, then they should be asked how they feel and if there is concern they should be encouraged to recover or to seek medical advice before they exercise.

The following appears in Expectations under everyone

Everyone is expected to:

If unwell then:

- *Refrain from training until they feel they have fully recovered.*
- *Follow medical advice about how much exercise is appropriate.*
- *Withdraw from competition.*

Club Officers are expected to:

- *Encourage members to refrain from training and competing when unwell.*
- *Encourage member to seek and follow medical advice when appropriate.*

I think we should say something more explicit and will include this in next year's update.

I think the first thing to understand is that clubs make entries for events and not individuals or crews. It would be a huge problem for events if clubs entered people who were not fit or able to complete the course. It does not matter whether they are competitive, it only matters that they can complete the course without putting themselves or others at risk. As an umpire, I know how much trouble incompetent or unable crews can be.

In general, clubs should not ask about anyone's medical conditions but they should ask whether the member has any "limitations" that the club would be able to help them to accommodate. You can ask them to tell you about what they can and cannot do safely and what they need help to do.

Some people are stubborn and we sometimes have to act to save them from themselves. This can be tough but it can also be necessary. I feel that you were quite correct to act in this way on this occasion.

There was also some discussion about fitness to train and there was a reminder that rowing in competition with its greater levels of supervision can be safer than training.

Perhaps we can separate training in preparation for competition and training for its own sake. In effect, this is a distinction between competitive rowing and recreational rowing (or rowing for fun). I think the problem in this case is that we have a rower who wants to continue to compete and his training has been focused on preparation for racing. If he understands that he is no longer able to take part in races, and he probably never will be able to do so, then his attitude to training may change. This is really tough.

It is possible for sensible people with health challenges to gain significant health, including mental health, benefits from continuing to row but this depends on their attitude to rowing and their self-control. Care and support from their club and their friends will also help. We should encourage this.

The tough challenge is to get this chap to understand that his racing days are probably over. The masters vice-captain has, very bravely, started on this process.

It is important that this rower understands that there may not be a route for him to return to competitive rowing but, if there is one, then it will result from his medical treatment and not solely from his own efforts on the water and in the gym. He should be clear that this is not a matter of his own efforts and should not feel under any pressure to over train. In this case the threshold for overtraining may be very low. His doctor, or neurological team, should be able to advise him on this.

It later transpired that the club will be carrying out an assessment of the crew and arranging further meetings with the individual concerned to see how it can understand further his rowing needs and aspirations and how we as a club can provide help with this whilst also ensuring he continues to row in a safe environment.

In respect of his condition this is openly discussed by the individual at the club and is common knowledge to most members. The vice-captain and other club members have been to Parkinson's help groups with him with ergos to demonstrate the beneficial effects of rowing for people with the illness.