



BRITISH ROWING

# HRSA Monthly Report

March 2019

Stephen Worley

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT



## **Another member of the public rescued by rowers**

Following the rescue described in last month's report, there has been another rescue.

I have received a report of an incident involving a rowing crew rescuing a person who had fallen into a canal. The weather on the day was good but quite cold. A crew on the water in a training session had stopped briefly so that the crew could take on water. When they restarted rowing one of the crew members, saw a man fall into the canal. The boat stopped as the man was trying to climb back onto land; this attempt failed as the bank was too high. The man started calling for help. The boat was manoeuvred so as to be close to the man. However, the man was in shock so could not get hold of the boat.

The cox inflated his lifejacket and threw it to the man, in an attempt to keep him floating long enough for the boat to recover him. However, by this point he was struggling to keep his head above water. The cox decided that the only option was to get into the water to save him. The cox stripped off outer waterproof layers and jumped in, managing to get hold of the man and keep his head up. After swimming the man to the side of the canal, the cox was just able to stand on the bottom.

A nearby boat owner heard the calls for help and came to offer assistance. However, the man was too heavy for two people to lift onto the towpath. One of the other rowers entered the water to assist. He was helped onto the towpath by the boat owner and the three of them then pulled the man onto the bank. While this was happening, a rower in the boat had managed to get cox's phone from his jacket and call 999.

The man was not breathing when he was brought onto the towpath. One of the crew members conducted CPR (but not mouth to mouth) before getting the man into the recovery position. After some strokes to the back with the hand, the man coughed up water and started breathing. The boat owner had warm blankets which were used to cover the man and both the rowers who had been in the water.

The ambulance and police arrived - the paramedic dealt with the casualty while the police took witness statements from those on the bank. The man was taken to hospital with suspected hypothermia.

The approach to this rescue was exemplary. The rescuers did not immediately jump in the water to save the victim. Their entry into the water was a considered and controlled having first tried other methods of rescue. It is also worth noting that people are heavy and very difficult to move and especially to remove from water - in this scenario it required three people to get the victim onto the towpath. It is also important that the cox was carrying a mobile phone and the crew were able to call 999.

I have nominated the rowers involved for a [Royal Humane Society](#) award.

## **Incident Reports in March**

In one incident during indoor strength and conditioning training, one end of a 20kg Olympic style weight bar fell 10 – 12 inches onto the top of a junior rowers head.

An ice pack was administered and he was examined by the school nurse. Initially he felt fine with no loss of consciousness; dizziness with no other symptoms of concussion. About 60 minutes after the incident he started to find it a little difficult to focus his eyes. He described feeling "spaced out" when being collected by his mother to be taken to A&E. His history of several head injuries and concussions in the past making this a bit more concerning.

Sometime later, during a light paddle he did not seem well and the session was curtailed. After the session he described what felt like pressure behind the left eye. During the short warm-up jog he said it had felt like he was jumping and again felt pressure in his head though not where he was struck. He said he felt the same pressure when rowing on the water with any level of exertion.

His mother was called to be updated and collect him and take him to A&E. Doctors confirmed delayed, mild concussion. He was not permitted to train for the following 2 weeks and there is a very clear return to sport program now in place to be monitored through each 48 hour stage until he is symptom free.

The layout of the gym has been changed to prevent reoccurrence and provided refresher training on concussion has been provided to coaches. There is information on [head injuries](#) and [concussion](#) in recent [Safety Alerts](#).

The remainder of this summary is organised under several headings as there were some common themes.

### **Wind and Weather**

There were multiple capsizes at a JIRR trial when the wind strengthened. Rescue efforts were disjointed as radios were not available.

A boat was blown into the bank by a sudden squall of wind and rain. The safety launch was blown into the boat when it went to help.

A club gazebo was blown away when the wind strengthened, damaging the gazebo and the roof of the car it landed on.

A 2x was blown into a tree and held there by the strong stream. The crew climbed into the tree and were rescued by the safety launch. The boat became wedged in the tree and broke in two.

A junior 4x capsized in strong winds opposite a nearby rowing club. The wind forecast for that time included wind gusting to 42 mph, the actual conditions were worse and included wind, rain and hail. The crew was rescued by their coach and members of the club on the opposite bank. They were distressed and very cold and wet.

The lessons to be learned are obvious:-

1. Check the weather forecast
2. If the weather is bad then do not go afloat
3. If the weather deteriorates to the extent that it becomes hazardous then get off the water

### **Incidents involving Coaches**

Last month I included guidance on “Coaching Safe Behaviour” with the monthly report. It is interesting to note that in March there were several incidents reflecting on the behaviour of coaches.

In one incident a coach had prepared his WJ13 crew so well that when they capsized after striking bridge posts they climbed on top of their boat and were rescued by the coaches using a throw rope. They were wrapped in thermal blankets and returned to their club.

On the other hand, in March coaches were reported:-

- Simultaneously driving a launch and filming a crew.
- Driving a launch without a kill cord
- Pushing an 8 out from the boating hard straight into the path of a 2x which was doing a firm pressure piece. (Coaches should keep a good lookout too.)

### **Incidents involving Launches**

A launch capsized when the crew were videoing the Senior Men’s 8. A qualified, but inexperienced, launch driver, failed to notify the camera person of the change in direction of the launch. This resulted in the sudden violent weight shift within the launch that caused it to capsize. Two people entered the water and were wet and cold, but otherwise unhurt. Once back inside the launch they made a swift return to the boat house, where they had warm showers and warm drinks.

In another incident, the launch driver tried to turn the launch and, due to the weight distribution, it took on water and capsized. It drifted down stream where it was secured by another launch. The members involved will no longer be allowed to drive club launches.

A gust of wind picked up bow of another launch and set the boat on its side against bridge stonework. The coach slipped off the boat, and pushed it back upright as he pulled the kill cord. He maintained contact with the partially swamped boat and managed to roll back in over the bow. A PLA launch arrived, retrieved the paddle, and loaned the coach a bucket to bail out the boat and then towed the launch back to the boathouse.

In other incidents:-

- Gusts of wind blew a launch into a 4-, the bow of the 4- was caught on the mooring cleat of the launch and broke off.
- The throttle handle snapped off in a launch.

## **Rowing in Strong Winds**

An experienced Tideway rower has written to British Rowing expressing the view that rowers should learn to row in strong winds and rough water and boats should be adapted to better cope with these conditions. This would result in fewer winter rowing competitions being cancelled so that rowers who had trained hard for a competition would be able to compete in it. He made some strong and valid points and his statement is reproduced, in full, in Appendix 1. My response is reproduced in Appendix 2, this refers to my thoughts on “Is it safe or fair to run an event” outlined in the February report and some further thoughts, for example about the opportunity for people who do not normally row on the Tideway to prepare for the conditions that can be found there.

Tideway competitions have objective criteria on which to base their decisions on whether or not their event should be cancelled. The advised criteria are presented in Appendix 3. The PLA shows great interest in the decision making of competition organisers.

Please read these Appendices and consider whether we should strive to adapt our approach to rowing in rough water to make the sport more resilient to bad weather. Please share your thoughts by writing to [safety@britishrowing.org](mailto:safety@britishrowing.org).

## **Circulation of Monthly Reports**

There has been a request from one region that these reports are distributed to all members of British Rowing. This has been agreed by the Director of Partnerships and Communications but the mechanism by which they will be communicated is yet to be defined. It may take a little time before this is resolved.

I intend to continue the circulation by direct e-mail to those people who currently receive the report from me so that they will receive it early and be prepared to respond to questions from people who receive it later.

## **Rower with suspected epilepsy**

There was an enquiry about a rower who had recently experienced a fit of unknown origin. There was no history of a previous episode and none had occurred since. The fit is being investigated for cause. The club asked for advice on whether it should stop the member from on-water rowing pending the result of this further investigation. The member wondered about crew rowing but with a buoyancy aid.

The response was to direct the club to the [Medical Panel guidance](#) and recommend that the club assume that their rower is suffering from epilepsy until there is a clear medical diagnosis that there is some other cause. This is the prudent approach and this guidance has been incorporated into the 2019 version of RowSafe.

It was also advised that the rower should not rely on buoyancy aids or lifejackets as people who are fitting may have no control of their breathing and inhaling even a relatively small volume of water can be fatal.

## **Action following ingestion of potentially contaminated water**

There was a request for advice from a club that had recently had two capsizes in singles in which river water was ingested to the later detriment of the subjects. In both cases a stomach upset resulted, causing missed days of schooling and training. The club asked for advice on a prophylactic that could be offered as first aid.

This request was referred to the HMA, Dr David Zideman, as this is essentially a medical matter. His response was as follows:-

*“There are no prophylactic measures that can be taken following the ingestion of river/lake water. The prophylactic use of antibiotics is not recommended. I would suggest that following small ingestions of contaminated water that the rower takes advice from their General Practitioner if they develop gastrointestinal symptoms. If the rower swallows a large quantity of water then they should be taken to the local emergency department (or equivalent) soon after the incident just to be checked but this visit will probably not be able to predict or treat any future gastrointestinal occurrences.*

*The drinking of salt water, flat coca cola, etc. are not effective.*

*If a rower (or cox) has been immersed they should have a hot shower following immersion and be especially careful to wash and clean any open cuts or grazes - this should prevent Weil's Disease(Leptospirosis). If they develop a flu-like illness (muscle cramps, diarrhoea, vomiting, rash) between 2 days and a month after immersion then they must visit their GP or go to an Emergency Department and tell the healthcare professional that they had been immersed in river/lake water so that they can be investigated for possible Leptospirosis.”*

## **Is it appropriate for a parent to row with their child?**

There was an enquiry about the possibility of a parent rowing with their daughter in the mornings as the weather improves. In particular, does there need to be a Club Official or designated person in attendance. The club has previously taken the stance that should any junior be on the water then there must always be a named supervisor for children at any time as if something were to go wrong the first question asked would be who was supervising at the time. This person(s) is club DBS checked in normal practice and is either on a launch with the crew or alternatively is on the river bank with the crew in view. Is it sufficient that the Junior will be with their parent or would we be required to have an independent supervisor cover the session?

The response was that from a pure safety perspective was that if both the daughter and the parent are capable of rowing in a 1x safety (and have demonstrated competence) then they should be safe to row together in a 2x. Rowing together in a bigger boat would be even more safe.

I suggest that you consult your club welfare officer and include them in this discussion.

However, I know that from a safeguarding perspective, it is not good practice for a parent to coach a junior crew that includes one or more of their children. Other people may assume that there could be favouritism, particularly where selection is concerned. There may also be a problem of bias or enhanced expectations of a parent for their child. It is important that all children are supervised by a responsible adult at all times when they are at the club, you are quite right to ensure that this happens at your club.

This enquiry was referred to Laura Fieldman, the Lead Safeguarding Officer, who provided further advice.

## **Adverse comment about the late cancellation of a competition.**

An adverse comment was received about the failure to cancel a competition when strong winds were forecast. This resulted in a boat being blown off a trailer and striking a junior rower, five metres away, on the face and shoulder. She was treated by a doctor and first aider at the competition and was taken to hospital by car. It was too windy for the air ambulance to land.

It also resulted in boats being trailered to and from the competition in strong winds.

My detailed request for information from the competition organisers is included in Appendix 4.

## **Throw bags**

Work with BSi continues. A partial draft of the new standard was reviewed and comments were made.

## Coaching of Deaf Rowers

There was a request for advice from a club that has had a Learn to Row enquiry from a group of deaf ladies. This was referred to a member of British Rowing staff who has extensive experience of this matter. Her advice was:-

“Sarah Harris ([Sarah.Harris@britishrowing.org](mailto:Sarah.Harris@britishrowing.org)) the Head of Education and Training may have some sensory impairment guidance.

*From my own personal experience, not just as a deaf rower but also a coach of deaf rowers, it is important to establish with the group what would work for them.*

*Some people wear water resistant aids, and some don't, some rely on sign language and others lipreading. So the first conversation is what they currently use in sporting activity by way of equipment. (Deaf Equipment is very expensive and so even if they have it, they may not be willing to risk it getting wet!)*

*This means some typical coach habits may have to be adapted, for example a megaphone might hinder rather than help as it obstructs the person from being able to lipread.*

*Coaching launches, or even bicycles typically drive alongside a boat, however the positioning of the launch needs to be such that the rower doesn't need to turn their head too far to be able to see the coach. Calls that are said during a piece are unlikely to be heard or understood and therefore dialogue is best when the crew has come to a stop. That said, even if the rower does not use sign language, that doesn't mean you can't determine an agreed set of signs to indicate (for example) when the crew needs to stop, to row on, to increase effort, decrease effort, etc.*

*Final considerations I would have depends on what the club generally does but there should be additional considerations for fading light, or rowing in the dark. It's not impossible! I rowed many times in the single in the dark - just make sure that you are happy with their competency (understanding of the river and possible dangers) and that the coach has a light on their own face, to light themselves up to be seen.”*

## RowSafe 2019 updates

The 2019 updates have been defined, documented and are in the process of being incorporated into the text of RowSafe. It is hoped that the 2019 edition will be published in April.

A PowerPoint presentation listing the updates has been produced and is included with this report.

## Safety of unaccompanied boats

There was an enquiry about the safety of rowing when not accompanied by other boats as there is no specific advice on this in RowSafe. It was explained that it is not possible to be specific as it all depends on the risks present at the specific location and the capabilities of the rowers involved. This is a matter to be determined in the Club's risk assessment. Reference was made to the Safety Alert on "[Is it safe to go out alone](#)". This mostly relates to scullers who can be alone in both senses (only boat and only person in the boat). There are more Safety Alerts in [the archive](#).

There was an exchange of information about the venue where the correspondent rows and the place where I row (we both row on reservoirs) and it soon became clear that these venues were different in so many ways that different approaches to this issue was appropriate at each.

## National Water Safety Forum - Watersports Workshop

The first meeting for some time was held in March. This took the form of a strategic review.

Much of the discussion was around the [National Water Safety Forum drowning prevention strategy](#). This defines the following target:-

- By working in collaboration we intend to reduce the number of accidental drowning fatalities by 50% by 2026 and reduce risk amongst key populations, groups and communities.

“Drowning” in this context means death due to accidentally striking or being immersed in water. It includes death due to hypothermia and is not just limited to death due to drowning. It does not include suicide.

It is several years since a member of British Rowing died by drowning (however defined) it is clear that the safety practices developed in British Rowing provide good examples that others can follow.

## **Appendix 1 Racing in Strong Winds - a discussion**

*Note – This is the text of a suggestion sent to British Rowing by an experienced Tideway rower. Any ideas expressed here are his and not mine or those of British Rowing.*

The increasing frequency of storm-force winds is playing havoc with our head racing programme. Already this season the Scullers, Schools and Women's heads have been curtailed or cancelled and, at time of writing, we wait to see if HoRR and VHoRR will be similarly affected. Fearful of repercussions from insurers, lawyers and reputational damage in the press, organisers seem keen to avoid "sinkings" at all costs and, as a result, cite this as a safety concern behind any decision to cancel. The months of work and sacrifice by thousands of competitors are thrown aside and we all shrug our shoulders hoping next year will be different. I wonder how many people drift off to other sports, with a greater certainty of reward for the hard work they put in?

It strikes me that as a rowing community we have a choice to make: stay as we are, and accept the erosion of our racing programme (no racing between December and April?), or adapt to the new conditions and ensure that racing can continue. As a way of provoking debate I'd like to offer the following observations;

1. Rowing boats don't sink. For years water-tight bow and stern canvases have meant that boats become water-logged but don't sink. Recent requirements for increased buoyancy have improved the situation further and, although you can't row at the same speed, it is safe to remain with the boat and you retain some manoeuvrability. Being water-logged is not a pleasant experience (rowing on the Tideway will teach you that!), but it's not necessarily a threat to life and limb, even in winter temperatures. Nor, if you stay in the boat, are you at risk of drowning. To non-rowers, "sinking" conveys the idea of people in kit having to swim in fast flowing rivers and choppy water. We have to ask, are we conveying the wrong picture to insurers, the PLA and other authorities that regulate our practices?
2. Pumps should be mandatory – either through the whole winter or maybe just for head races. The 2016 Women's Boat Race clearly demonstrated the worth of pumps in heavy water. The rest of us should follow that lead - pumps cost a fraction of a coxbox and are frankly a no-brainer. If crews were required to carry them, the risk of water-logging diminishes and the ability to race in strong winds improves. During races, coxless boats and singles would have to pause momentarily to activate the pump but, as with heading out of the stream towards calmer water, the decision and ability to do so without losing too much speed would become part and parcel of the skills of racing. One practical concern is the lack of space in the foot-well of small boats and singles. Perhaps rowing accessory suppliers could develop a lightweight cradle to fit across the stern saxboards and hold a pump in place? I'm sure that given the demand, someone would be able to bring a suitable, low-cost product to market.

3. Crews should become better prepared in how to row in rough water. Dealing with rough water is tricky, but not impossible. You certainly can't row at the same pressure and it relies on the art rather than graft of rowing. Perhaps that's what puts crews off practising? However, crews that master it seem to glide through the rough, taking on less water than their rigger-bending adversaries. With pumps to deal with water-logging, the skill levels to row clean would become crucial. Is that really such a bad thing?
4. Should we accept that some boats will become water-logged and be unable to continue racing? Sports such as cycling and rugby offer far greater threats of injury, but there is no consensus for these competitions to cease. Why is a greater test applied to rowing? If we are open to the possibility of being water-logged and realistic about the dangers, all that remains is for competitors to be properly trained in how to react and how to remain safe. Unfortunately, the tendency to cancel competitions means that less importance is placed on developing these skills and crews become less able to cope with strong winds, resulting in a greater need to cancel competitions.
5. Competitions should provide specific instructions on how to leave the racing line safely in the event of becoming water-logged or if directed to do so by a marshal. The main danger with water-logged crews is slowing down ahead of the fast approaching crews behind them. Race committees should make it explicit that such crews have to retire from the race, similar to VHoRR's paragraph on what to do if your steering fails. The instructions should be prescriptive in terms of warning other crews; remaining with the boat; where to steer; where to empty the boat of water etc and emphasise a requirement not to create a hazard for other crews. Sanctions might involve all crews from the same club receiving a time penalty or ban. Providing specific guidance would in any event reduce the risks of being water-logged, reducing the imperative for competitions to be cancelled.

I believe we need to change our mind-set and start to adapt to what is now the new reality. You may agree with some, all or none of the above but it would be interesting to have a debate on how we cope with the challenge we're now facing. It would be good to hear your thoughts.

## **Appendix 2 Racing in Strong Winds - a response**

Dear sir,

Your message to British Rowing has been forwarded to me as it is my role, as Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser, to provide advice on safety throughout British Rowing. Please understand that as safety advisers, the challenge that I, and my colleagues, face is to help people find safe ways to participate in the sport that we all love. The advice and guidance that we provide aims to do this. However, we have to recognise that there are occasions when it is not safe or fair to hold competitions.

You have clearly thought carefully about the recent impact of the weather, principally the wind, on our competitions and your suggestions have a great deal of merit. However there are other considerations that we must take into account.

This year we have encountered some extreme weather events, a quick search revealed this information about this year's storms. The following is taken from the Met Office website

### **[Storm Gareth](#) 10 to 16 March**

The UK experienced a turbulent week of weather from 10 to 16 March 2019 as a succession of Atlantic low pressure systems brought strong winds and heavy rain, driven by a powerful jet stream. This spell included storm Gareth on 12 to 13 March, the seventh named storm of the 2018/2019 winter.

### **[Storm Freya](#) 3 to 4 March**

Storm Freya, the sixth named storm of the 2018/2019 winter, was a rapidly deepening area of low pressure as it crossed the UK, bringing strong winds and heavy rain to England, Wales and southern Scotland. This storm rapidly followed another deep area of low pressure which brought some very strong winds across Scotland.

### **[Storm Erik](#) 8 to 9 February**

Storm Erik was the fifth named storm of the 2018/2019 winter. This was a deep Atlantic low pressure system bringing strong winds across the UK. Storm Erik was a fairly typical winter storm - notable but not exceptional for the time of year.

I believe that the wind in 2019 so far has been exceptional and if this continues in future years then we will have to reconsider our approach to rowing generally, and to competitions. This would involve a fundamental change to the nature of our sport. It would become more like sliding seat coastal (sea) rowing as practiced by clubs in the Coast ARA and the Hants & Dorset ARA. However, even these two Associations do not race in the winter.

We should also recognise that the effect of the weather on competitions extends beyond what happens on the water. This year we have had worrying incidents on land at competitions and people have been injured. In one case a rower suffered an injury when a boat was blown off a trailer and struck them on the shoulder. Boats have also been blown off trestles.

Many people travel a considerable distance to take part in a competition and there have also been incidents due to the effect of cross-winds on trailers.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, I issued the following advice, this followed a spate of unfortunate incidents at competitions. At that time the concern was for high winds and low temperatures.

*In view of the current extreme weather I would like you all to consider the competitions that you run. Please understand that extreme weather incidents, of a variety of types, are becoming increasingly common so this is also relevant in the longer term. Please forward this note to anyone it may concern.*

*In the week before your competition please consider whether it would be safe or fair to run it. Please consider the weather forecast and its implications on:-*

- *travel to the competition*
- *trailer towing*
- *parking of cars, towing vehicles and trailers*
- *unloading trailers at the competition*
- *moving people and boats on land at the competition*
- *walking in the launch area*
- *launching*
- *rowing to the start*
- *waiting on the water*
- *racing*
- *recovery of boats and people onto the land*
- *loading of boats onto trailers*
- *travel home*

*Please remember that it is dangerous to tow trailers in icy or very windy conditions. The risks during transit to and from a competition are more serious than those at the competition. Please do not ask people to put themselves at risk.*

*The presence of ice on the water, or in the launch or recovery areas, and the presence of slippery conditions on land should also be taken into account. Do not expose people to these risks. Please also consider the strength of the stream and the water conditions generally.*

*It is neither fair or safe to expect people, especially juniors, to wait on the water for extended periods. If it is too cold for people to be waiting on the water then consider whether the competition should take place. Sometimes waiting on the water can be the result of an unplanned incident, please take this into account too.*

*Please also consider the welfare of officials, coaches, spectators, etc. You have a duty to care for them too.*

*Do not leave it too late. An early decision to postpone or cancel will be much appreciated. It means that clubs will not need to load their trailers and gives people time to find something else that they can usefully do on the day of the competition.*

*Whilst the financial implications of cancelling a competition can be significant it is also worth taking into account the goodwill that an early decision will deliver. Also, people will remember the negative experiences they have had travelling to competitions that were cancelled late and be less keen to travel there again. The same applies to competitions that were not cancelled but should have been.*

Many people row and train on sheltered water where the conditions are benign. They do not have chance to practise for the conditions that they are likely to encounter on a bad day on the Tideway. It would be unfair and unsafe to expect them to race in conditions that they only experience very rarely.

We should also consider the safety of people when rowing on rough water, both in training and in competition. People who choose to row in rough water are free, subject to their club's rules, to do so but if they do then they are also putting the safety of others at risk. Launch drivers often come to the aid of rowers in difficulty, in rough conditions the risks can be high and we have recently had a few incidents with launches being blown sideways or capsized in bad weather.

Safety at large competitions, such as the various Heads on the Tideway, can come to depend on the skill and courage of launch drivers, however if there are many people afloat in bad weather then it does not take much for the rescue capacity to be overwhelmed. The risks to people who are not used to the conditions, rowing in rough water and high winds, with no effective safety cover are simply not acceptable.

Last Saturday, the day that the Women's Head was cancelled, I was afloat in Richmond in a skerry doing a Coach Assessment. A skerry is a stable, 6 oared, fixed seat, rowing boat (a bit like a Thames cutter or a lighter version of a Cornish pilot gig – sorry to be a bit vague but I am a conventional sliding seat rower). The conditions were windy and rough in places but safe for this type of stable boat. In sheltered areas there were few problems but in exposed areas, particularly where the wind was blowing across the river, the conditions were challenging, the boat was tending to move sideways across the river. I did not see any conventional rowing boats afloat, this is fortunate because had the river been crowded then the risk of collision would have been high.

Please let me deal with some of the points that you make. People may drift into other sports because of their frustration in not being able to compete but the experience of competing in dangerous conditions may have a similar effect. People, particularly juniors and their parents, may be put off rowing if they feel that their safety is at serious risk.

You are absolutely correct to say that rowing boats do not sink. Indeed, we tell people that if they capsize then they should use their boat as their life raft. However, if a boat is swamped such that the buoyancy of the crew's bodies is helping to keep the boat afloat (as permitted by FISA rules) then it becomes difficult to manoeuvre the boat. In conditions where the stream is flowing strongly and there are static obstructions (e.g. bridge pillars, moored boats, Dove Pier, etc.) then the risks can be significant.

If pumps were to be in common use then rowing in bad conditions would be safer. However, people who normally row in sheltered water would probably not have pumps and not know how to use them. There is a great deal of logic in expecting people who habitually row in challenging conditions to carry and use pumps. This should be discussed further but is ultimately a matter for each club's risk assessment. Crews rowing in rough conditions should also be encouraged to fit wash boards. These used to be common but may have now gone out of fashion.

I agree that those crews who have the desire and opportunity to row in rough water should be better prepared to do so and develop the skills needed. In these conditions skill beats brute force. However, crews that choose to avoid these conditions should not be put in a position where they are expected to compete in them.

Rowing is a fairly safe sport in the UK but there have been serious injuries and fatalities in other countries. I am afraid that you are never going to persuade me that it would be acceptable to expose more rowers to risk of serious injury just because there are more injuries in other sports such as rugby and cycling. It is interesting to note that there were several fatalities in inland canoeing in December 2017 and January 2018. I could not countenance a similar situation in rowing. The dangers are real, we are a safe sport because many people work hard to keep it safe.

Thanks again for raising these interesting and valuable points and we should work to make rowing in rough water safer. If we can define ways to improve safety then I would be happy to make recommendations to those involved.

## Appendix 3 - Guidance for Competitions on the Tideway. Weather and Stream Parameters

	3	2	1	0
Wind Speed	Force 5	Force 3-4	Force 1-2	Force 0
Wind Direction		NE	WS	
PLA Flag Status(1)	Red	Yellow		Green
Precipitation(2)	Take Action	Be Prepared	Be aware	None
Air Temperature		<4C		>8C
Visibility(3)	< 200m	reduced		Good

1 PLA Flag Status <http://www.pla.co.uk/>

2 Precipitation <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/warnings>

3 Visibility <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/guide/weather/severe-weather-advice/fog>

Any parameter that meets the column 3 criteria would mean the event is cancelled. Other columns show the perceived risk level to the event, severity increasing by column number. Any combination of factors may mean restrictions are put on the event escalating to cancellation if necessary.

**Wind Speed** - Those events where cancellation has taken place the wind was forecast to be Force 5 (20mph), below that the wind speed needs to be looked at in combination with wind direction air temperature and rainfall.

**Wind Direction** - This will vary with events. Two things need to be considered. Firstly wind against tide at various parts of the events course. Secondly difficulty in marshalling.

**PLA Flag system** - This should be monitored before the event for any trends, but the PLA do not expect events to run on a Red Flag.

**Rain Fall** - I used the Met Office warning system for this. Events need to consider the air temperature and wind speed along with rainfall as to whether athletes should be expected to wait sometime before starting and the risk of exposure, particularly younger competitors.

**Air Temperature** - This needs to be considered along with wind speed (wind chill) and rainfall as above. Looking at wind chill factor charts and given a possible maximum wind speed of 20mph, 4C seems to be the cut-off point as to whether wind chill should be considered.

**Fog (Visibility)** - I looked at the Met Office web site for a definition of dense fog to get the 200m. Remembering the adage down on the Embankment that if you can't see the Gardens opposite the Boat Clubs you don't go out I checked the distance across the river using Google Earth. The distance from the road to the Gardens 200m.

## Appendix 4 Failure to cancel an event early

I have received two incident reports and an adverse comment about the failure to cancel the competition in good time. Doing so would have ensured that crews and boats would not have had to travel to the competition. This resulted in significant injuries to a junior rower as I will explain below.

The weather for this weekend was as forecast and caused the Gloucester Spring Head to be cancelled. The met office weather summary for this day states "On Sunday, 10 March, a low pressure system tracking across southern England brought some very strong winds to the southern half of the UK." There is an isobaric chart for that day at [https://beta.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/interesting/2019/2019\\_004\\_stormy\\_spell.pdf](https://beta.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/interesting/2019/2019_004_stormy_spell.pdf) .

One Incident Report states as follows:-

*An off-water incident required an ambulance and a hospital visit for a female junior athlete at a competition.*

*The athlete was struck by a another club's quad that had been blown by a strong gust of wind from the top rack of her club's boat trailer. The trailer was taking some boats from a local club by arrangement. The forecast had been for strong winds - gusting to 41 mph (BBC weather) or 47-49 (Met Office). The athlete was standing approximately 5 metres downwind of the trailer assisting her crew mates in de-rigging her quad ready for loading onto the trailer. The quad knocked down the four people who had been holding it while they were involved in tying the boat to the trailer, was blown quickly off the trailer and landed across another quad before striking the athlete in the face. She fell to the ground and was kept in position being attended by a doctor and first aider while an ambulance was called. She was assessed by paramedics in the ambulance and taken to a local hospital.*

*The athlete was discharged from hospital after an X ray showed no fracture of the shoulder.*

*There were four people holding the boat, but the gust was exceptionally strong.*

*The quad was significantly damaged as it landed across another quad; the shell was sliced by the saxboard of the other quad; the cost of damage repair unknown. There was no visible damage to the first quad.*

*There was impact on the face/shoulder (of the Junior rower). First Aid was administered immediately. An ambulance was called and took the athlete to hospital. The athlete was discharged after an X ray showed no fracture of the shoulder.*

The other Incident Report states

*The competition was disorganised with trailer space allocation. The sheltered trailer park was full of cars, so there was no space for trailers. The trailer was forced to park outside the sheltered trailer park, on the road most exposed to wind. The competition organisers said the regatta was going ahead so everyone unloaded their trailers and rigged their boats. Then 15 minutes later they said the regatta was cancelled so everyone derigged their boats and started to load their trailers. Four rowers put our Wintech 4x+ on the top of the trailer and one of them started to put a tie around one end. A 65mph gust of wind pulled the boat out of their hands. The boat hit his head, hit a Janousek boat and then hit a junior girl on the shoulder.*

*The competition organisers should have cancelled on Saturday night (9th March). There should not have been any trailers at the venue in winds of 40mph plus gusts.*

*The competition organisers should have managed parking such that cars were parked out on the road exposed to wind and trailers were in the trailer park sheltered from the wind.*

*Paramedics called an air ambulance for the junior but it was too windy for the helicopter to land. She was driven to hospital for an X-ray. No fractures but still a lot of soreness and bruising to the shoulder and neck.*

*The Wintech 4x+ has a massive gash in the middle of the hull. The boat may be written off, tbc.*

I issued the following guidance on February 2nd and incorporated this guidance into my monthly report for that month (attached). The guidance states as follows:-

***Is it safe or fair to run an event*** (this is reproduced in Appendix 2, above, and omitted here)

I understand that the advice from the venue management was that the water conditions would be such that the competition could go ahead, I also understand that this advice was incorrect. My concern, and therefore my question, does not just relate to the use of an unsheltered car park. It relates mainly to clubs being encouraged to travel to the competition and tow trailers. It is, of course, the responsibility of the organising committee, rather than the venue providers, to decide whether it is safe to hold the competition.

My question simply is can you please explain why, in view of the weather forecast, this competition was not cancelled in good time so that clubs would not have to load their trailers and tow them to the competition and subsequently unload and handle them in such unsafe conditions?

I have copied this note to my colleagues in your region as I am sure that they will be interested in your answer.

Notes

1. The name of the competition, the clubs and the rowers have been omitted to maintain confidentiality.
2. The word “competition” has been used in preference to the word “event”, throughout this report, in deference to the Rules of Racing.