

Safety Alert - don't be swept into danger

There have been two recent incidents where strong streams have swept boats into an overhanging tree and a badly moored barge. These caused two 4+s, one 8, and two coaching launches, to capsize. Twenty people became cold and wet. Fortunately, they were all rescued and nobody was seriously hurt. However, all the boats were damaged.

Clubs are advised to consider the conditions and the capability of the crews, including their coxes, carefully before allowing crews to go afloat. In these conditions, simple errors can be compounded and the situation can worsen very quickly.

Conditions

The speed with which the water is moving is only one factor, it is important to consider the:-

- Presence of turbulence, for example around obstructions, bends, etc.
- Wind strength and other weather conditions
- Presence of hazards that crews could be swept into or over
- Presence of other river users
- Presence of floating debris or water contamination

The Cox and the Crew

It may be safe to proceed if the cox (or steers) is competent, confident, decisive, experienced and has good local knowledge but only if the crew is powerful, responsive and disciplined.

Launches

Some launches are not designed for rescue and may become unstable with more than one extra person on board or when people climb onto them. See [RowSafe 7.4](#).

Think ahead

If possible, start the outing by rowing upstream. This will avoid having to row back against the stream with a tired crew. If possible leave and approach the landing stage when heading upstream, this will help to avoid being swept away from the landing stage.

When rowing upstream be aware of potential hazards and obstructions ahead. Be prepared to turn while still downstream of them.

If you are rowing with the stream and there is an obstruction ahead then take early action to avoid it. Boats drift sideways very quickly when beam on to the stream so do not leave it too late. Do not forget that the rudder will only work if the boat is moving through the water. It may be necessary to steer by pressure.

If in doubt; don't go out

Stephen Worley
Honorary Rowing Safety Advisor
safety@britishrowing.org

March 2018