

**12. WASH**

- 12.1 Wash is held by rowers on the Upper Tidal Thames to be one of the principal hazards, often quoted as exceeding the risk from collision. Severe wash can either capsize smaller craft such as single and pair sculls or cause swamping, resulting in boats sinking and crews being deposited in the water. In some cases excess hogging/sagging has caused severe fractures in longer boats. Novice rowers, especially scullers, are particularly susceptible to wash. Whilst primary wash has the most immediate effect, secondary wash or washes reflected from the bank can be more difficult for a rower to anticipate and counteract.
- 12.2 The wash and ensuing risk varies with the combination of state of tide, width of river, nature of the bank and distance from the vessel or bank. For a given vessel characteristic and speed the risk to rowers appears greatest at high water when the flats are covered and wash rebounds from built up steep or vertical banks. Particular locations identified are from Putney Railway Bridge to Dukes Meadow, and from Chiswick Bridge to Syon Park, especially on the Middlesex Bank. This is higher than would be/is encountered in a tideway with gently sloping banks, but not felt to be any higher than can be anticipated for the conditions. In addition to the speed limit of 8 knots 'through on or over the water' powered vessels are also required to limit the amount of wash that they produce.
- 12.3 Wash from Class V operators (with one or two named exceptions) was not found to be a significant problem. A combination of vessel design (sleek u/w profile low Cb) and the responsible operation of vessels, which included early speed reductions to minimise wash and the alerting of rowers whilst still well ahead by means of sound signals, helps to reduce the problem.

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- 12.4 Wash from pleasure craft (PDV): Unfortunately because of the timing of this study during the Autumn and Winter months very little motor leisure cruiser traffic has been observed. However, anecdotal evidence from various river users suggests that the apparent ignorance and amateurish actions of some users does increase the hazard. Many leisure boats do not have the relatively sleek hull design of most Class V vessels and may produce rather more wash for a given speed. It is apparent that whilst some cruiser users reduce speed and take considerable care to minimise wash, others reduce speed far too late to have any effect. A few will power on with apparent total ambivalence as to the possible damage that they may cause to other users, particularly rowers. However, in general terms it has not been determined that wash from pleasure craft exceeds that which would normally be expected on a waterway with an 8 knot speed limit. Rowers particularly mentioned the confused and heightened effect of wash at high water reflecting off vertical banks when created by a string of cruisers following each other at maximum speed of 8 knots in convoy
- 12.5 Comments were also received about the amount of wash generated by some Rowing Club coach boats. Whilst under the PLA byelaws coach boats are permitted to exceed the 8 knot speed limit whilst actually accompanying and coaching rowers, they still need to monitor their wash and the effect on other river users including other rowers. Whilst some coach boats may produce moderate wash with one or two persons on board, the wash will become rather heavier with three people. Coach boats are required to be licensed by the PLA as conforming to limits of maximum wash, however, the implementation of this requirement appears to have largely fallen into disuse over the last few years. Although drivers of coaching boats are required to be over 16 years of age, no training or certification is required, although the ARA Water Safety Code does recommend that drivers undergo a course in boat handling skills such as RYA Level II – see also ARA initiatives and Recommendations
- 12.6 The level of wash generated on the river is also combined with a lack of awareness or ability amongst some rowers to deal with it. There is an apparent lack of experience and/or poor training regarding the most effective means of riding the wash which exists amongst some members of the rowing community. This is combined with the lack of an effective lookout and resulting awareness of what is approaching. The latter is probably exacerbated during intense training and “pieces” when rowers are totally concentrating on style and technique rather than the river ahead, which can result in a sudden rude awakening. A number of submissions from various river users, including some rowers, mentioned the use of unnecessary and offensive language by a few rowers who had been interrupted by wash during such training.

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- 12.7 Discussion with many rowers suggested that the usual way of riding wash was to head straight into it, whereas some experienced rowers, including members of clubs used to greater levels of wash in the Greenwich area, stated that the most effective method to deal with more severe wash, particularly when in longer boats, is to turn parallel to the waves. Some rowers specifically stated that they would avoid using the river at times of high usage by cruisers and likely resultant wash as part of their risk assessment. These times were identified to us as being most likely at summer weekends, particularly when there was a Bank holiday.
- 12.8 Speeding, and resulting wash, by the emergency services has also been raised in interviews. It is necessary for these craft to operate at times well above the speed limit. At such times it would always be prudent to forewarn other users of their approach and high speed by using their flashing lights and/or sirens. The same guidance as is presumably provided to shore based vehicles should prove sufficiently robust to counter noise pollution / light pollution criticism. Given the less regulated traffic on the river this appears prudent in all respects.
- 12.9 Enforcement of speed limits is one topic that has featured in both written submissions and discussions with river users. Currently there appears to be little ability or determination to enforce the speed limit other than by visual observation by the duty Harbour Services launch, although radar speed guns should be available as are also utilised by the EA launches. We understand that at times the Environment Agency personnel initiate high profile campaigns on speed limits above Teddington. We note also that the EA maintains a rather lower speed limit on the non tidal Thames above Teddington of 8 kilometres per hour (4.2 knots) over the ground together with a wash restriction.
- 12.10 One suggestion for monitoring speeds and reinforcing speed limits on the river has been the fitting of radar guns (speed traps) and the use of radar activated speed warning signs on bridges. Notices on bridges or alongside the river reminding users of the speed limit would also assist.
- 12.11 We have considered suggestions for additional speed restrictions for powered leisure craft but have concluded that a lower limit would not be practical, particularly for vessels steaming against the tidal stream. With commercial operators constrained by timetables and tidal height, and risks to others apparently already mitigated through hull form and overall consideration in their operation it would not be prudent or particularly effective to reduce the speed limit with respect to them.

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- 12.12 On balance, this study has not found that the wash normally created by power driven vessels is greater than one would reasonably expect in a tideway allowing for a speed limit of 8 knots through the water. However, on occasions particular vessels may produce excessive wash and, in some areas and some conditions on the river, the wash may be exacerbated. Certainly the river is a facility for all river users and we do not believe that a reduced speed limit would be appropriate.
- 12.13 The submissions and discussions identified the need for training and education to increase awareness of other river users and their characteristics and problems. Also there is a need for all to accept that the river is a complex and dangerous common highway rather than a boating lake or a racing circuit. All river users need to have a desire to compromise on all sides. Whilst captive audience of rowers (mainly identifiable) and club based PDV users can be reached and educated through their member organisations, the question of the casual, non-affiliated user remains.