

WATER SAFETY AND ELECTED MEMBERS

A Reach and Rescue brief guide to the role of Elected Members, Member Champions and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in creating water safe communities.



SEE VIDEO HERE

THE ROLE OF THE FRA ELECTED MEMBER...

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) takes a strong operational role in the national strategy on behalf of FRAs, but it is suggested that elected members on FRAs can have a major governance impact on the level or priority and attention given to the issue of water safety at a local FRA level. Some questions that an elected member can ask include:

- What is our water safety strategy and where does water safety appear in our IRMP?
- Who is the lead officer for water safety?
- What initiatives do we take part in as an FRA?

There are already a series of campaigns and resources that have been made available through a variety of national partners. These campaigns and resources have in some cases been designed as a broad-brush approach to

preventing drowning whilst others have been designed to target a very specific demographic. It is essential that consistency is maintained in delivering key messages. A bank of resources is available that allow national resources to be localised. This list highlights several already established campaigns:

- The National Fire Chief Council's Be Water Aware Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Week
- RLSS UK's Don't Drink & Drown Campaign
- RLSS UK's Runners and Walkers Campaign
- RLSS UK's Spring Clean
- RNLI Respect the Water
- The Lifesaving Society's National Drowning Prevention Week

DROWNING CAUSES MORE ACCIDENTAL DEATHS THAN FIRE OR CYCLING

Drowning in the UK accounts for more accidental fatalities annually than fire deaths in the home or cycling deaths on the road. Hundreds of people drown in the UK every year and thousands more suffer injury, some life changing, through near-drowning experiences. Evidence shows that 44% of drowning fatalities happen to people who had no intention of entering the water. This is a stark reminder that it isn't just traditional water users who get into danger and a large proportion of victims did not leave home on the day they died intending to go into water – its people out walking or running.

Despite the data showing an apparent randomness to drowning, the risk of

drowning is much more identifiable, and therefore preventable. The answer is for councils and other agencies to work in partnership to tackle water safety in their area, and Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) are an integral player in water safety partnerships.

At a national level, the Fire and Rescue Community is an integral part of the Drowning Reduction strategy through the primary body for reducing the level of drowning which is the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF). The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is a member of

'On average, in the UK and Ireland someone loses their life to drowning every 13 hours'



"Reach and Rescue equipment was recently used in Storm Dennis improving firefighter safety and saving public lives"

the NWSF, as are some 80 local authorities. The Forum has produced the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-26, which aims to reduce drownings by 50 per cent by 2026. At a local level, councils want communities to enjoy open spaces and leisure facilities in their areas and to ensure that both locals and visitors enjoy the natural environment safely. This toolkit is to help councils create a partnership and plan to do that.

WHAT IS OUR APPROACH TO PUBLIC RESCUE FROM OPEN WATER?

This question is perhaps the most relevant, as the FRS is frequently called to water rescue incidents, and in the past this role has led to the tragic loss of firefighters at water rescue incidents. In England, FRS's do not have a specific statutory duty to respond to water rescue incidents, but they do have a duty to identify and respond to risk

within their communities by helping to keep people safe, and clearly would want to support any initiative that reduces the risk of drowning. The dilemma facing all rescuers is balancing the risk of exposing the rescuer to harm when weighed against the potential for saving the victim. However, the data tells us that, given the predominance of

drowning in open water, there is a strong case for improving open water safety by preventing falls into water and by focusing on increasing the possibility of self-rescue/public rescue and survival through the provision of public rescue equipment (PRE).

PUBLIC RESCUE AND PORTSAFE

The tragic event of a drowning can cause devastation across communities. Each needless loss of life however can be used as a catalyst and inspiration to attempt to stop any further such tragedies occurring by embarking on a

meaningful and impactful journey to address the local issues. National guidance from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) about public rescue equipment states:

“Public Rescue Equipment is an additional mitigation that may afford the victim extra time or support to enable rescue”

WHAT IS PUBLIC RESCUE EQUIPMENT?

PRE is a phrase to describe a range of devices which include throw bags, life rings, and rescue poles. There are many products on the market, but Reach and Rescue are incredibly proud of their relationship with the FRS community that has led to some of the most effective water rescue equipment in the market, from a company based in the North West. The main PRE, our Rescue Pole is currently being used by around 80% of the Fire and Rescue services in the UK and being distributed around the world. Our experience has taught us that when elected members are asked to consider what PRE to procure there are some clear criteria for them to consider.

- PRE that requires the rescuer to enter the water to reach a casualty should not be used. For example, a personal flotation device with line attached.
- PRE device should be retrievable once deployed, reusable and flexible - e.g. can it be used for animal rescue.
- The traditional large life ring is less effective when a rescuer is required to throw rather than lower the equipment to a casualty.
- PRE should be of a weight that is not overly affected by wind conditions and should not present a danger to the casualty.
- Minimum instructions should be required to use effectively and safely.
- PRE locations should also act as information points as part of an education strategy.

WHERE SHOULD PRE BE LOCATED?

The legal framework around waterway liability is a complex one, and an excellent summary is set out in the ROSPA document - Managing Safety at Inland Water Sites.

In summary, if a waterway is under the control of local council, the council should undertake a risk assessment procedure (RAP), and reasonable steps should be taken to reduce the level of risk. Reasonable steps could be to remove the risk through improving the area of risk as well as providing PRE - however, PRE should be part of a whole strategy for drowning prevention and is not an isolated solution. For PRE to be useful the following must occur:

- The victim must be seen
- They must remain afloat until rescue takes place
- Appropriate rescue equipment must be to hand, and in operational condition
- An assessment of the area and its users should provide the basis for the use of PRE at any given site. The other important criteria for siting PRE is in terms of a wider education strategy.
- The rescuer must have the ability to effect a rescue
- The victim must be able to cooperate, i.e. grasp a rescue device.



HIGHLY VISIBLE COMMUNITY REASSURANCE FROM £550

Portsafe provides emergency services and members of the public a crucial opportunity to conduct swift and directionally-accurate rescues by giving them permanent access to effective rescue equipment that is designed to retrieve casualties in the water from safe distances. The system therefore minimises the danger posed to the rescuer whilst also boosting casualty survival chances. Developed in response to repeated reports of vandalism with existing water rescue systems, Portsafe securely houses a long-reach telescopic rescue pole and an emergency throwline inside lockable boxes that are accessible via a code granted by quoting the Portsafe's location number to the emergency services. Our innovative Portsafe concept is a multi-function tool:

- It incorporates lifesaving PRE that meets the relevant criteria
- It is a highly visible deterrent and information point - increasing awareness of everyday risks, in, on and around water
- It can gather information and data about usage of the area and enable better profiling
- It is a clear community safety commitment by the local authority
- It has been shown to be less prone to vandalism than traditional life rings
- It is cost effective with an entry point product from £550
- Linked to 999 control room



CASE STUDY 1: "A Life Saving Device" - Portsafe Saves Public Life in Bedford

We were challenged by our colleagues at Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to overcome a specific list of limitations with current rescue solutions such as liferings. The result is numerous Portsafes situated at high-risk public water locations across the county.

After only two days in situ, a Portsafe with telescopic rescue pole on the embankment in Bedford was successfully deployed to save a member of the public from drowning.

A statement from Nick Lyall, Superintendent & Head of Operations at Bedfordshire Police:

"On the 3rd June 2019 Police were made aware of a person in the river, at The Embankment, Bedford. The individual was some way out in the river. The officer attending noticed the reach pole, and immediately requested the pin number. The officer hadn't been trained to use the pole, but it was easy to use. The pole was used to reach the person in the river and bring them to the safety of the bank where they received the medical care they required. From my perspective, a life saving device."



CASE STUDY 2: Manchester Portsafe Features in BBC North West Tonight Don't Drink and Drown Campaign News

Reach and Rescue Portsafe installed in former accident blackspots along the Rochdale Canal in Manchester City Centre was featured in a special report by BBC North West Tonight. Airing on Thursday 5th December, the news piece focused primarily on the safety measures that have been put in place at lock 89 of the canal since the tragic drowning of student Charlie Pope in 2018.

The Portsafe itself was installed through extensive collaboration with The Canal & River Trust, Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and through the inspirational campaigning of Charlie's dad, Nick Pope.

News reporter Mark Edwardson comments on how intuitive the poles are to use: "these poles are designed for complete novices like me to use," he directed to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Station Officer and chair of the Manchester Water Safety Partnership David Wilson. David's reply: "having this equipment nearby improves the chance of people surviving."



CASE STUDY 3: Portsafe Installed Alongside River Severn as Part of RLSS UK Drowning Prevention Campaign

A Portsafe with telescopic rescue pole and emergency throwline was installed alongside the River Severn in Worcester city centre through collaboration with our official Water Safety Partners the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK). The Portsafe itself is dedicated to Worcester University student Tom Jones, who tragically passed away just days into his course in September 2018 after falling into the river whilst walking home alone after enjoying a few drinks with his friends.

The RLSS UK's Don't Drink and Drown campaign aims to raise awareness of the heightened dangers of water to people who have been drinking. According to official statistics, between 2013 - 2017 there were 451 accidental drownings involving alcohol and/or drugs in the UK; this represents 29% of all accidental drownings that occurred during this period.

The Portsafe installed in Worcester is the highpoint so far of a collaborative effort taking place across West Mercia with the PCC's Home and Dry Network raising awareness of water safety. Worcester City Council and the University of Worcester both pledge their support.

WHERE IS PORTSAFE INSTALLED?

i 'Despite having the highest levels of drowning deaths in the UK, there are no Portsafes in Scotland or Wales'



Greater Manchester



Lake Windermere



Bedfordshire



Worcester

WHO ARE REACH & RESCUE?

Reach and Rescue have been saving lives for 10 years. When equipped with our innovative, long-reach telescopic water rescue poles and equipment, rescuers are able to retrieve casualties from safe distances without putting themselves in danger.

Not content with saving lives in 48 countries, our continuous strive for innovation has led to the development of the public-access water rescue system - the Portsafe. Collaborative efforts with emergency services, local government - in addition to our official Water Safety Partnership with leading drowning prevention charity the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) - has led to numerous Portsafes strategically placed at some of the most high-risk public water areas in the UK.



Jo Taylor MBE
REACH AND RESCUE DIRECTOR

*Recognised for her services to
safeguarding in the Queen's 2020
New Year Honours*

Jo's collaborative focus towards ensuring organisations work together to deliver positive change resulted in Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and Bedfordshire and Luton Councils coming together to install Reach and Rescue's Portsafe public access rescue systems across local public waterways. The system saved a life just two days after installation.

Jo also led the joining up of the Canal & River Trust and regional Fire Services, which have installed her public access water rescue solution in over 50 UK locations - including 20 at high-risk locations across reservoirs in Greater Manchester.

Reach and Rescue also provides support and services to multiple charities; Jo donated a Portsafe to the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS UK). Her 1-2-1 work with Watersafe UK also revolutionised how they undertake water rescues with Jo's equipment saving 12 lives during the last year alone.



WHAT TO DO NEXT ...

Call us now on: **03301 595 088**
or email: sales@reachandrescue.com

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