

# lifesaving times

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**lifesavers**  
The Royal Life Saving Society UK

## Bill for life

We've all heard of the postcode lottery, but did you know that this also applies to drownings?

On average three times more people drown in England than in all of the other countries put together.

And this doesn't just affect coastal locations. Each year the majority of drownings take place in rivers and streams.

With the rise of extreme activities, it may be expected that there will be a resulting rise in drownings. However, as long as the right safety measures are taken, these activities need not affect the figures.

On the contrary, most people drown because they fall into the water.

Our conclusion is that water safety messages need to be publicised far more to allow people to become aware and ensure their own safety. This is our job and it is one that we undertake with relish.



## Not waving but drowning

Welcome to RLSS UK. With the start of the New Year, you are no doubt thinking about the issues which will affect you and your constituents in the next twelve months. Have you considered that during the next year, there is likely to have been at least one death by drowning in your constituency?

This drowning will not just have affected the victim. Parents, grandparents, siblings, all of these people, and more, will have had their lives changed forever.

Sadly, this figure is consistent. During just one Parliamentary term of office perhaps 250 people in your constituency may have suffered first-hand grief as a consequence of drowning.

The good news is that this figure can be reduced. And you can play a part in helping us to achieve that.

We are the Royal Life Saving Society UK and we exist to prevent drownings.

For now, all we ask is that you read this publication and look out for future editions. Thank you for taking this time.



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# Open water safety

The UK is blessed with thousands of miles of open water. From rivers to lakes, and reservoirs to canals, every constituency boasts open water venues.

Water holds a special attraction and it is fantastic that people want to visit their local sites. But it is at these locations that most drownings occur.

We are calling for all sites to be made as safe as possible.

Ownership of open water varies, but our message remains the same:

- Erect clear signage, with visuals, to show that it is dangerous to venture into the water
- Place at the site appropriate and visible rescue equipment, such as lifebuoys or throwing aids
- Make sure that the location of the open water is displayed for a rescuer to relate to the 999 operator.

As MPs, please consider how you can help us to get this message across to landowners.

# Who are the RLSS UK?

The Royal Life Saving Society UK is a charity that exists to save lives.

We are the governing body and leading provider of training and education in lifesaving, lifeguarding, water safety and life support skills (such as resuscitation) in the UK and Ireland.

Each year over 30,000 volunteers instruct approximately one million people in these techniques, including members of the public, school children and pool and beach lifeguards.

We have been in existence since 1891 and have enjoyed royal patronage since 1928. Our current patron is Queen Elizabeth II.

Our philosophy is to:

- Educate people in basic water safety principles
- Make people aware of danger and encourage them not to take unnecessary risks
- Teach people how to make safe rescues

- Train people in basic resuscitation techniques which should be employed until the emergency services arrive.

## Facts and figures

- Roughly 500 people drown in the UK each year
- Drowning is the third most common cause of accidental death among young people under the age of 16
- Too many rescuers every year drown while trying to save someone else
- Annually, more than three times as many males die by drowning than females

# The trusty boys in blue

Until recently all policemen and women in the UK had to have a safety and rescue qualification. The rules have now changed and this no longer a requirement, although many forces do still build in basic rescue skills.

Public confusion surrounds which emergency service holds responsibility for inland water rescues. But if a bobby witnesses an incident, there is no doubt in the public's mind that they should conduct the rescue. And they often do, putting themselves at risk.

Please help us to raise awareness of this issue and put pressure for time and money to be put into providing water rescue training for every man and woman in blue (see 'How you can help' article on page 4).

## Do you know?

- In January a 42-year old woman from Aberystwyth was given an anti-social behaviour order banning her from much of her home town's seafront. The order was given after the woman had tried to kill herself by attempting to drown at her local beach at least 36 times.
- Earlier this year, a man who saved his best friend from drowning was fined £68 for breaking a byelaw that bans anyone from entering the water. Daniel Roy, 19, from Dorset, jumped into Weymouth harbour when he saw Andrew Cowley struggling. As well as the £68 fine, Weymouth magistrates also gave Daniel a year's conditional discharge.
- MPs are often lifesavers too. John Prescott joined the ranks in 2004 when he helped to save someone while canoeing.
- Former Olympic swimmer, Duncan Goodhew, who trained in lifesaving, successfully resuscitated someone who collapsed on a pavement in front of him. Just shows that Lifesaving skills are portable, stay with you for life and can be used away from the water.



## Against all odds

When you book a holiday of a lifetime, you rarely consider that the vacation could threaten your life. This was the scenario that Roy Phillips, a 33-year old fireman with West Midlands Fire Service and a previously RLSS UK-trained lifeguard, faced.

On December 26 2004 Roy was enjoying a holiday in Phuket, Thailand, when he witnessed the terrible fury of the now renowned tsunami.

After being swept, by the sea, through a glass shop front, he managed to escape onto a nearby roof. However, as his training came to the fore, Roy scanned the water and noticed a forearm grabbing at thin air. Diving under the surface he found a woman, who he rescued and helped up onto the roof.

Still in the water, he next went to the aid of a terrified man holding onto a pillar. It took all of his strength to break the man's grip, who he then towed to the roof.

As the water began to recede, Roy saw a man wading nearby. When he turned back to the sea, however, he saw another surge of water coming their way. Together with another person, he reached down and pulled this man to safety.

For his courageous and heroic actions, RLSS awarded Roy Phillips the HRH Prince Michael of Kent Certificate of Merit.

## Do you know what to do?

If you happen to see someone in trouble in the water, do you know what to do?

The best advice is not to put yourself in danger. Ideally, do not take your eyes off the victim and either call 999 or get someone else to do this.

While waiting for professional assistance, try to talk to the person in the water and keep them calm. If they have nothing to hold on to to keep them afloat, look for a flotation device that you can throw to them. This could be a log, or even a half-filled plastic bottle of water - anything that can be used to help keep them afloat.

Next, consider if there is anything you can use to reach the person to pull them in, which will not involve you going or falling into the water. This could be an item of clothing, if they are close enough.

Only wade into the water as a last resort - test the depth of the water first with a stick, never take your feet off the bottom, and keep hold of something sturdy that anchors you to the edge.

# Media tips

Each time that there is a drowning or water-based save made in your constituency there is an opportunity for you to help RLSS UK by gaining media exposure.

It will be valuable, as you could be giving out advice that prevents future deaths.

Tips you could give include:

- Supervise youngsters closely when in parks or in other places that might have a river, pond or lake.
- Ensure paddling pools are emptied and turned upside down as soon as they are finished with, and fit fencing around ponds or pools
- Be vigilant - always supervise children when around water, and, if playing in water, ensure they stay within their depth.
- Keep inflatables attached to a line, so you can control them safely from the shore
- Rivers and lakes - be aware of the unseen dangers of currents, underwater obstacles and cold water
- For more advice, or for courses on water safety, contact RLSS UK on 01789 773 994 or at [www.lifesavers.org.uk](http://www.lifesavers.org.uk)



## MP focus

For our first edition we speak to RLSS UK supporter Alison Seabeck, MP for Plymouth, Devonport for her views on water safety.

"Water safety is something that I know about, thanks to having spent eight years as an RLSS UK-trained swimming pool lifeguard. In fact I only gave up my voluntary position when I became too busy in the House.

"In my constituency we have many visitors to the beaches. We enjoy an excellent lifeguard service. But there is a challenge. When a swimming pool gets too busy lifeguards restrict who can go in the water. Currently, no such restrictions apply to beaches. This is a threat to public safety.

"I am also concerned about how many people drown when untrained would-be rescuers rashly go into open water to save someone who is in difficulty. People must be taught how to save others while remaining safe themselves.

"RLSS UK exists to educate people in water safety and prevent unnecessary deaths. I hope that all MPs can see how important it is to support this cause."

## How you can help

RLSS UK is dedicated to preventing unnecessary loss of life. But we can't do it alone. Please will you help?

### Could you become an RLSS UK buddy?

- Would you be willing to meet with a representative of RLSS UK to understand our aims and then contact us each time an opportunity exists to influence drowning prevention?
- Would you be willing to ask questions in the House on our behalf?
- Would you help us by putting pressure on landowners in your constituency to provide clear water safety signage at open water sites?
- Would you support your local RLSS UK volunteer lifesaving or lifeguarding club?
- Would you encourage the Department of Education, local education authorities and local schools to include additional water safety and drowning prevention as part of the school curriculum?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, or if you would be willing to help us in any way we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please contact Di Standley, Chief Executive of the Royal Life Saving Society UK at [dstandley@rlss.org.uk](mailto:dstandley@rlss.org.uk) or call 01789 773994. We look forward to hearing from you.

Help us to reduce drownings in the UK.