



national
water safety
forum

A future without drowning:

The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy

2016-2026

“ Collaboration is essential if
we are to succeed in reducing
fatalities around the waters
of the UK”



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Development of the strategy document

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With particular thanks to the families who have shared their stories and the many individuals and organisations who have helped shape this document.

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Foreword

George Rawlinson

Chair - National Water Safety Forum

On average 400 people drown in the UK each year and a further 200 people take their own lives on our waters.

On average 400 people drown in the UK each year and a further 200 people take their own lives on our waters.¹ With your help this strategy could change those statistics for good.

Our UK search and rescue services are committed and highly effective, but even they cannot reach everyone. So the work of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), since it was

no intention of entering the water. This is a stark reminder that it isn't just traditional water users who get into danger.

We now have the knowledge and opportunity to reach the people at risk and change their behaviour. The NWSF believes that, if we work together, we can reduce drowning fatalities by 50% by 2026. This strategic document calls on you and your colleagues to respond; to make contributing to national goals your local priority. We have to collaborate and work in partnership if we're going to reduce drowning around UK waters.

Our national strategy highlights the key areas that we all need to focus on to make a difference. It asks stakeholders like you to support the development and delivery of local strategies that will contribute to the national plan. This will help to build the NWSF's expertise and progress, with the aim of preventing loss of life.

I'm asking you to go further than simply reading this strategy. Please digest it, support it and sign up to it. Let's be more effective than ever by targeting groups and activities, by raising awareness of the risks and - ultimately - by making every community safer. Thank you for your support and commitment.

“ Collaboration is essential if we are to succeed in reducing fatalities around the waters of the UK”

established over 10 years ago, has been essential. We've worked together with other organisations to make activities in and around the water safer and reduce the drowning risk. We now have detailed information about water-related fatalities in the UK. It helps us to understand who is drowning, where and why.

A World Health Organization (WHO) report has recommended that every country has a National Water Safety Plan.² With the help of the Water Incident Database (WAID), we have the information we need to meet that recommendation. For example, our evidence shows that 44% of drowning fatalities happen to people who had



Photo: Thearle Photography, Cowes

Introduction

PURPOSE:

Prevent accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by working in partnership to ensure consistent guidance for the safe enjoyment and management of activities in, on and around water.

AIM:

Reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50% by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities.

This strategy, developed by the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), is the first UK Drowning Prevention Strategy. Through the implementation of this strategy the NWSF aims to achieve a 50% reduction in drowning fatalities in the UK by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities.

This is a 'call to action' for current and future partners to contribute to the implementation of this strategy. It is a framework to guide the work of organisations and individuals who are interested in and have a responsibility for drowning prevention and water safety.



2.



Photo: National Coasteering Charter

Why do we
need a strategy?

“Drowning in the UK accounts for more accidental fatalities annually than fire deaths in the home or cycling deaths on the road”

People die and suffer life-changing injuries every day as a result of drowning in the UK. Drowning is among the leading causes of accidental death; about 400 people accidentally drown every year, which equates to one person dying every 20 hours.⁽³⁾ Some individuals survive drowning events but, many are left with severe, life-changing injuries.

Drowning has a huge impact: on families, on friends and on our communities. It places a significant burden on society both in terms of direct costs and the years of life that are lost.

The rate of death in the UK compares favourably in global terms. However, drowning in the UK accounts for more accidental fatalities annually, than fire deaths in the home or cycling deaths on the road.^(3,4)

Drowning often has complex and multiple causes – but they are preventable with simple and coordinated action. Interventions such as creating safer environments, providing swimming lessons and water safety education can help improve communities.

Our search and rescue, and emergency services respond to about 35,000 water-related rescue and flood events annually.⁽⁵⁾ There is currently a general downward trend in the number of people who drown due to accidents or natural causes. We believe that this success is due in no small part to the vital drowning prevention and rescue work that our statutory and voluntary services provide every day of the year.

Coordinated and lasting prevention programmes established by members of the NWSF and other organisations and individuals have had a proven effect, with many lives saved due to existing initiatives. However, in order to save even more lives a step-change in our approach is needed.[†]

“A step-change in our approach is needed”

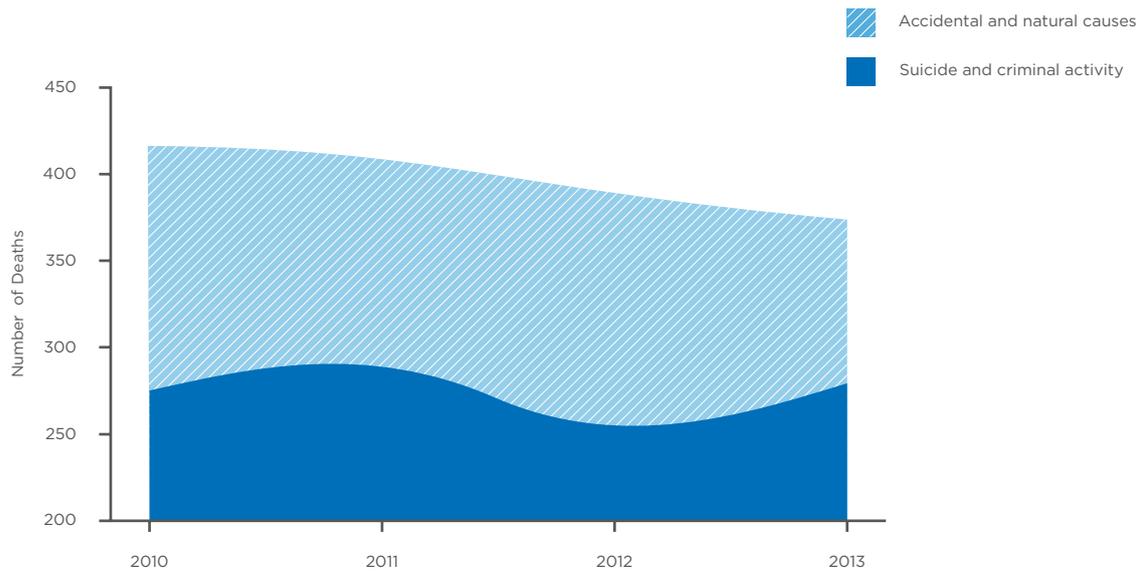


Figure 1: UK Water-related fatalities by suspected or confirmed outcome (WAID 2010-2013)

“Drowning is a serious and neglected global public health issue, claiming a shocking 372,000 lives each year”

Policy Drivers

The World Health Organization (WHO) report published in November 2014 highlighted that drowning is a serious and neglected global public health issue, claiming a shocking 372,000 lives each year.⁶⁹ The report highlights 10 recommendations to prevent drowning. One of which is for countries to develop and implement a national water safety strategy.

Within the framework for improving public health, accident prevention is an area identified as a responsibility for local authorities.⁶⁹ Targets contained in this strategy align with the outcomes for improving public health by promoting activity and reducing unintentional injury and harm.

Emergency services and local authorities are already required to plan for strategic risks, such as flooding. Further, they have a responsibility to identify and respond to locally identified risks.

Organisations and local authorities who are landowners and/or activity providers have clear obligations under workplace health and safety law, and in general terms have a duty of care towards visitors and trespassers.

This strategy provides a coherent, well-informed framework within which the NWSF and other organisations and individuals can plan, coordinate and prioritise their drowning prevention activities to ensure maximum impact, and a substantial and sustainable reduction in drowning in the UK.

Lives affected by drowning

Jayden Beaven was 4 when he suffered a non-fatal drowning event in a swimming pool at a friend's house during a children's party. This resulted in sustained and catastrophic brain injury due to a lack of oxygen.

Jayden's nan Lesley said: "We weren't there and we don't know what happened. At some point it looks like he slipped away from everyone. Somebody saw a pair of shoes in the pool and when they went to check it out, they realised it was Jayden.

"Because he was without oxygen for so long, he has been left in a persistent vegetative state. He's in a wheelchair now. He can't walk or talk, and needs help with everything and 24-hour care. He can't be left alone. He communicates to us through noises so we know what he likes and doesn't like."

Jayden's family are now supporters of the RLSS UK and are helping to raise awareness of the importance of water safety education and supporting campaigns to increase the public's knowledge of the risks of drowning.



3.

Photo: Canal and River Trust

Strategic themes



Evidence gathered from WAID indicates that accidental drowning fatalities in the UK occur in a wide range of age groups, activities and environments.

The risk of drowning for the UK population as a whole is relatively low. However evidence suggests the rate of drowning is increased amongst certain groups of people. We have identified four broad themes that will guide our work - communities and environments, demography, recreational and everyday activities and behaviours.

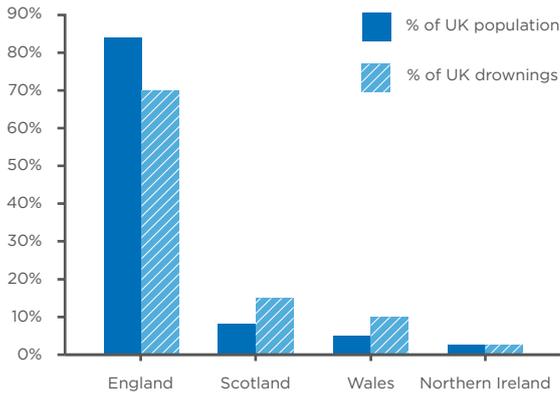


Figure 2: Accidental drowning death compared to the distribution of UK population. Based on UK drowning statistics (WAID 2010-2013) and mid-year ONS 2011 population estimates

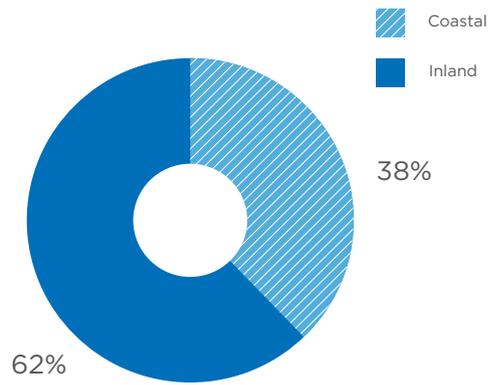


Figure 3: Accidental drowning death by location type (WAID 2010-2013)

Communities and Environments

Apart from a limited number of locations, such as tourist and visitor hotspots, fatal incidents do not tend to cluster in specific locations; however, there are a number of consistent patterns. In absolute terms, England records the highest number of accidental drownings (73%), Scotland (14%); Wales (10%) and Northern Ireland (3%). Relative to population, Wales and Scotland both carry a disproportionate burden.

Half of fatal incidents (52%) occur in just four out of thirteen specific parts of the UK,* namely; South East, South West, Wales and Scotland. This in part can be described as a function of higher population number, increased tourism and activity, and/or greater amounts of water in proximity to populations.

Almost two in every three fatalities happen at inland waters such as canals and rivers, lakes, quarries and reservoirs (62%). Coastal incidents account for the majority of those requiring a search and rescue response, but result in just over 1 in 3 (38%) of all fatal incidents.†

*13 specific parts of the UK: South West, Wales, South East, London, East, West Midlands, East Midlands, Northern Ireland, North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber, Isle of Man, Scotland.

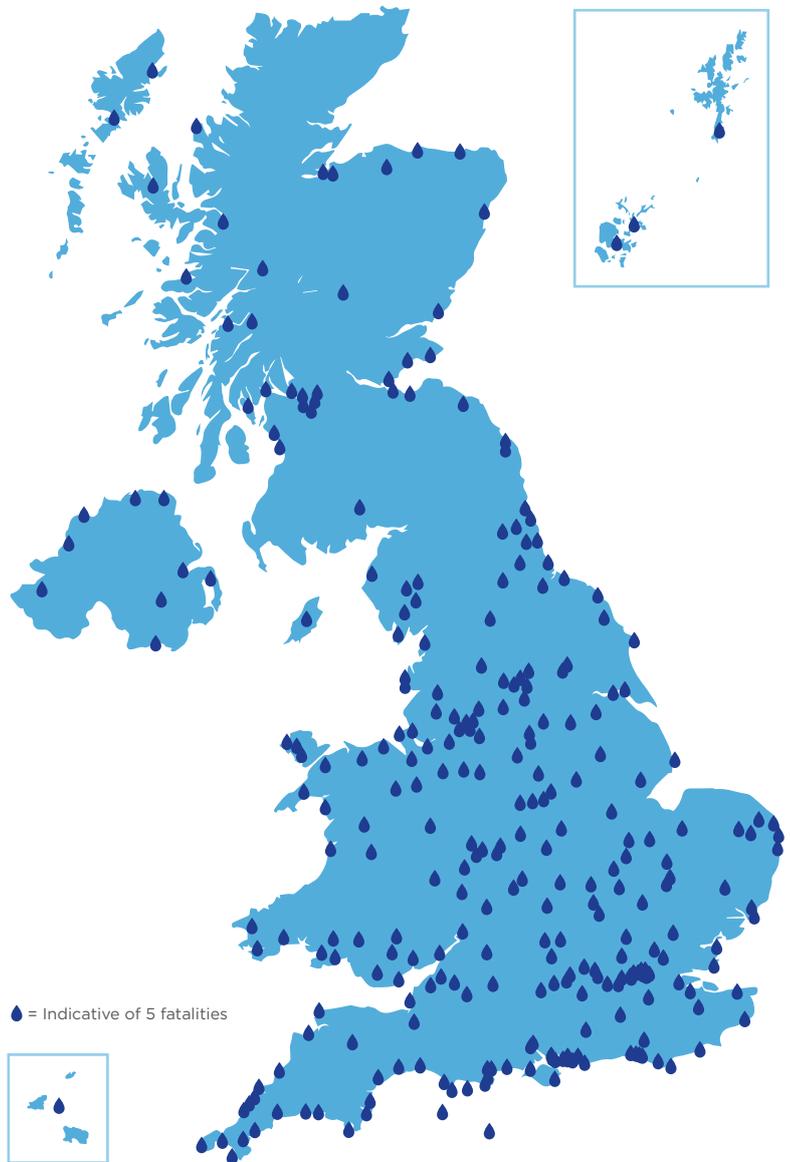


Figure 4: Indicative groupings of accidental drowning death by location (WAID 2010-2013)

†Figures rounded to the nearest whole.

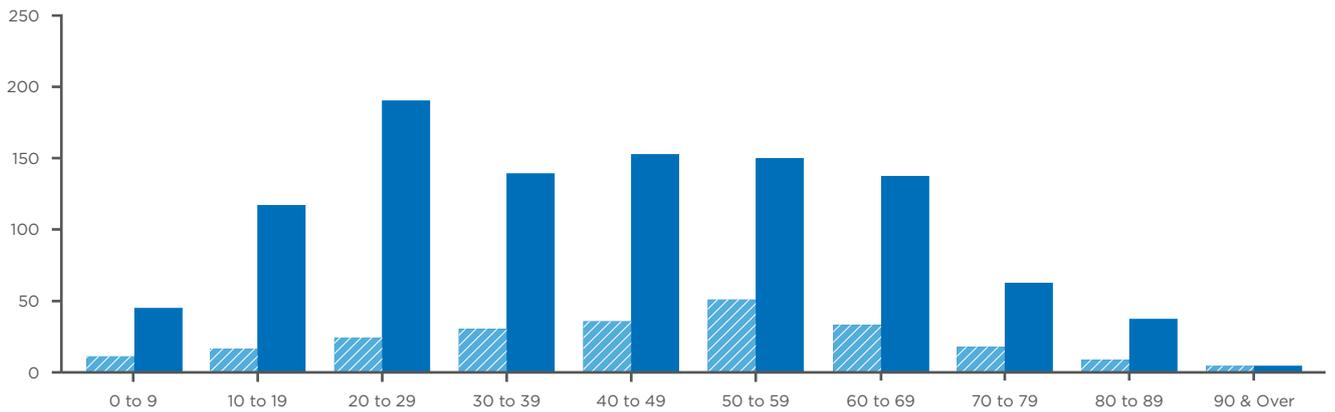


Figure 5: Accidental drowning death by age and gender of the person (WAID 2010-2013)

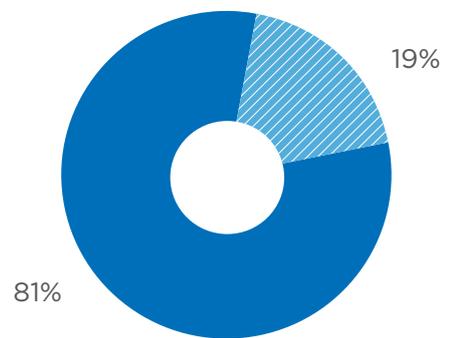
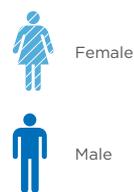


Figure 6: Accidental drowning death by gender (WAID 2010-2013)

Demography

Accidental drownings reflect normal, everyday activities, and happen throughout every stage of life. For example, young children are most vulnerable when they first begin to move in, around and close to the home and stray further from parental supervision, teenagers through risk taking and thrill-seeking behaviours, and middle aged adults due to increased participation as a result of more leisure time and available income. The elderly are more commonly affected by underlying health conditions which can lead to drowning incidents.

In every age group, men are the most at risk group, accounting for eight in ten of all the deaths. Fatalities rise markedly from mid to late teens and throughout the 20's; there is a distinct peak in the number of men drowning in the 20-29 year old age group. Among women those aged 50-59 are the most frequent casualties.[†]

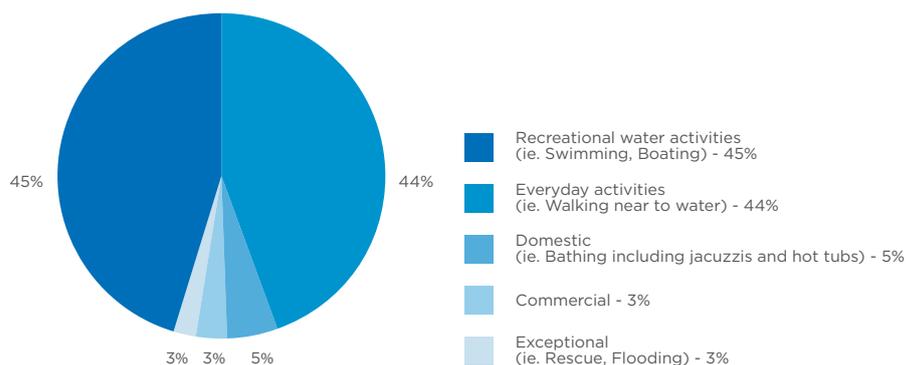


Figure 7: Fatalities by activity, where the activity of the deceased has been recorded (WAID 2010-13)

Recreational and Everyday Activities

In almost half of all fatal incidents (44%) the person had no intention of entering the water and were taking part in everyday activities such as walking. Contributing factors include: use of alcohol, condition of the location or premises and lack of use of appropriate protective clothing and equipment. These factors can be influenced by appropriate interventions.

Recreational activity on or near the water accounts for just under half of fatal incidents (45%). But when participation numbers are taken into account most activities present a low risk.

Recreational activities including watersports involve an acceptance of some voluntary risk. But considering the millions of hours of safe participation, most activities and watersports carry similar level of risks to cycling or being a passenger in a car. Fatal incidents at managed mass participation events and during supervised or coached scenarios are very rare.

Governing bodies are recognised technical experts in their field, and work hard to promote best practice and safe participation. By working in partnership we believe further improvements can be made.

Fatal incidents that happen around the home account for a small number of fatalities. These particularly affect vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, who would benefit from awareness-raising efforts such as highlighting the role of better supervision among care-givers, and environmental measures such as safety barriers for toddlers when they are near water. Likewise, these measures have been proven to work in public and managed swimming pools in which great improvements have been made.[†]

“In almost half of all fatal incidents (44%) the person had no intention of entering the water”

CASE STUDY

James Clark

James Clark, a happy-go-lucky 19-year-old university student, was out with his friends at a nightclub in Kingston-upon-Thames. After a fun evening of socialising and drinking, in the early hours of the morning the friends left, split into two groups and went off to find taxis. But neither group realised James wasn't with them.

By the next afternoon, friends and family began wondering where he was. Maybe he'd stayed the night somewhere? Then, when he didn't appear, and his mobile phone was not working, they were worried. They waited... and waited. After three agonising days, the police arrived at the family's door with the terrible news that James' body had been found in the river. Unbeknown to his friends, James had come out of the nightclub near the River Thames, stumbled in the dark and fallen into the water. James drowned, probably as a result of cold water shock.

This was a shock in itself because he was a strong swimmer. It was a tragic irony that someone usually so at home in the water and a fearless swimmer should die that way.

James was a lovable, popular young man studying to be a primary school teacher. Suddenly he was gone. It was a wonderfully promising life cut short. This terrible incident happened over 10 years ago in July 2005.

Almost immediately after his death, James' mother Andrea campaigned hard with Kingston Council for barriers to be put up along that particular stretch of the Thames. Three years later they were installed. Additional safety measures in the form of better lighting and clearer delineation of the edge of the towpath were also incorporated, along with lifesaving skills training for bar and restaurant staff.

Andrea is now helping the RNLI's Respect the Water campaign and said: "It's too late for James but not too late to make many other people think carefully about what they are doing and the inherent danger of water, even to confident swimmers. The loss of James was a tragic accident, but better awareness of the dangers, particularly in the younger age group, will undoubtedly reduce the likelihood of future tragedies."

Behaviours

Improved understanding of the events leading up to, during and after a drowning will enable us to understand individual behaviours and design relevant behavioural change messages, activity and interventions.

The following behaviour traits all increase the risk of drowning or being involved in an accident associated with the water:

- Underestimating risks
- Lack of knowledge of the risks
- Lack of competence
- Ill-informed thrill seeking
- Lack of parental supervision of children.

Individuals may also display unsafe behaviours because of group pressures and social norms. For example, alcohol has been a factor in 103 fatal coastal incidents from 2010-2013. In adults of working age, alcohol was a suspected or confirmed factor in about 1 in every 3 drownings.⁽⁹⁾

Understanding the decisions and factors which affect choice, such as the decision not to use key protective equipment such as lifejackets, will lead to smarter interventions and help inform participants' choices.

86 people might have survived (2010-2013) if they had worn a lifejacket or buoyancy aid.⁽⁸⁾

45% of children aged 7-11 (Key Stage 2) cannot swim 25 metres unaided.⁽⁹⁾

Two out of three people in the United Kingdom see water safety as essential or important when visiting the coast or riverside.⁽¹⁰⁾



4.

SWIM
TEACHER

Photo: RLSS UK

What we
intend to do

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.

By adopting this strategy, a reduction in accidental drowning fatalities by 50% by 2026 is achievable. This is a significant undertaking but is an aspiration to which we are committed. Aligned to this we aim to reduce risk among key populations, groups and communities.

In order to achieve our aspiration, the initial stage of the strategy, over the next 36 months, will address the following targets:

- **Every child should have the opportunity to learn to swim and receive water safety education at primary school and where required at Key Stage 3**
- **Every community with water risks should have a community-level risk assessment and water safety plan**
- **To better understand water-related self-harm**
- **Increase awareness of everyday risks in, on and around water**
- **All recreational activity organisations should have a clear strategic risk assessment and plans that address key risks.**

We have developed a small number of measurable targets for the initial stage of the strategy implementation. Adoption of a single target will have a limited impact on the overall aim. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on achieving them all in order to ensure maximum impact. There is a significant level of interaction between the targets, requiring a coordinated and collaborative approach. Successful intervention in one will have a positive impact on another.

Through monitoring and evaluation against our targets over the short to medium term, we will review progress and allocate resources accordingly.

Every child should have the opportunity to learn to swim and receive water safety education at primary school and where required at Key Stage 3

Equipping children and teenagers with the knowledge, skills and experience in swimming and water safety will contribute hugely to their long-term safety in, on and around the water. School-aged children are not a high-risk group, however drowning risk increases as children reach teenage years, peaking among 20-29 year olds. Encouraging safer attitudes and improving skills and behaviours ahead of time is an essential ongoing priority.

In order to reduce drowning in all age groups, children should have access to swimming and water safety education by Key Stage 2, with skills and knowledge addressed in Key Stage 3.

We will work with key partners in this area including communities, local groups and families as well as schools. Specifically, communities that identify water risks through their local risk assessments should prioritise this target.

Delivery of this target will include the following objectives:

- Work with key organisations to promote the importance of school swimming and provide support to schools and communities to implement the national curriculum standards
- All children to experience swimming and water safety in an open water environment through a defined programme
- Enable swimming providers to support the drowning prevention strategy through sign up to core water safety messaging
- Link this work to increasing awareness of everyday risks of water to ensure messaging reaches families as a whole.

CASE STUDY

Swim Safe

Swim Safe, an initiative developed by the ASA in consultation with the RNLI, was founded in 2013 and is increasing in popularity and reach every year.

Most young people learn to swim in an indoor pool which is a safe and familiar environment. Swim Safe gives young people the opportunity to test and improve their swimming ability in a different aquatic environment. Children aged 7 - 14 years old are offered the opportunity to attend the free 45 minute session which includes beach safety advice provided by RNLI lifeguards and up to 30 minutes in-water tuition with ASA accredited teachers.

The Swim Safe development team recognises that parents and guardians may also lack some of the knowledge and skills needed to keep themselves and others safe in an open water environment. The delivery model of Swim Safe means that parents and guardians also have the opportunity to receive the core safety messages and learn about the challenges of swimming in open water environments through their children.

Swim Safe is offered in a range of open water locations; the sea, sea pools, lakes and lidos, around the UK. The programme also offers opportunities for schools through the Swim Safe for Schools programme. This programme enables schools to bring whole classes down to one of the locations in the final weeks of the summer term and ensures the Swim Safe safety messages are spread as widely as possible.

Every community with water risks should have a community level risk assessment and water safety plan

In almost half of all fatal incidents (44%) the person had no intention of entering the water and was taking part in everyday activities such as walking.

In order to reduce the number of drownings we need to approach communities as a whole. The responsibility for managing water risks at a local level or given site is often dispersed among a number of organisations, so understanding this and working within this context is a foundation activity for lasting improvement to be made.

Developing a robust risk assessment and water safety plan is the minimum action every community should take. Reaching every community is a challenging target, and will take time to achieve. Using a standard methodology will allow communities to tailor their approach, while communities with the greatest risk will be supported and encouraged to work through all elements of devising a water safety plan.

We define communities in a number of ways including local authorities, community safety and/or public health boards and organisations who are landowners and/or navigation authorities. Many of these will overlap. In those instances we will seek to develop a single/joint risk assessment and plan.

Where possible these plans will be coterminous with government agency remits, in particular those for health, education, search and rescue, fire and coastguard.

Delivery of this target will include the following objectives:

- Ensuring communities have a standard methodology to work to
- The NWSF and its members will support the building of risk profiles, assessments and capacity to respond.

We will take a collaborative approach, seeking to work with those with greater level of risk, and with those local organisations, groups and communities already committed to increasing water safety and reducing risk.

CASE STUDY

Developing water safe communities: Durham City

Durham is a market town in the north east of England, shaped by the River Wear. The older parts of the city follow an incised valley, leaving a peninsula that has been central to the city's development. The fabric of the river, its banks and bridges vary considerably in terms of design and age, changing from modern canalised structures to semi-urban and green spaces all within a short walk.

Set among this are spectacular heritage locations and a designated UNESCO action area. The river - and access to it - is a central part of Durham's heritage and a significant tourist attraction, generating constant visitor and resident footfall with some locations along the river being important routes both day and night. City centre shopping, eating and drinking venues are in close proximity and overlooking the river. Just under 4 million tourists visit the city annually, whilst a significant university population equates to approximately 20% of the city's residents.

In Durham from January 2010 to March 2015, there were 56 water-related incidents, of which five resulted in drowning fatalities. Common factors included being male, being alone at night, being under the influence of alcohol and being a student. The incidents happened in close proximity to the high footfall areas, and the heritage locations.

A team led by the Durham City Centre Safety Group worked with RoSPA to undertake a strategic review of the water safety risks within the city. The team included representatives from the local authority, police and fire services, public health teams and various city centre riparian landowners including the cathedral, council and Durham University.

Key outcomes to date include:

- **Improved lighting and safe routing information around the city**
 - **Engineered improvements to key sections of the riverside, considerate of the heritage needs for the location**
 - **Increased provision of public rescue equipment at strategic positions along the riverside**
 - **Improved inspection and monitoring systems and regimes for the key risk areas**
 - **Awareness campaign to highlight new transport and route safety information, as well as alcohol safety awareness messaging and initiatives**
 - **New policy to ensure that all new builds are planned with water safety in mind.**
-

Increase awareness of everyday risks, in, on and around water

Significant progress has been made through campaigns such as the RNLI's national drowning prevention campaign, Respect the Water, the RLSS' Drowning Prevention Week, as well as other drowning prevention and safety programmes. With increased national coverage and local targeting, we aim to continue to help the public make safer choices around the water.

Through public water safety campaigns and messaging we aim to increase awareness and understanding of the risks relevant to the UK population as a whole but with particular focus on the identified target audiences.

A multi-level approach will be most effective. This will enable both local and national organisations, groups and communities to be able to support the delivery of this target.

Delivery of this target will be achieved through the use of the following channels:

- Advertising: large-scale channels that have the greatest reach to the target audience
- Ambient: thought-provoking materials to disrupt attitudes and to re-frame the risks
- Media coverage: a core set of evidence-based safety messages will be available to those spokespeople undertaking media interviews
- Social media: campaigns will use the viral nature of the internet and consistent terms to allow sharing of stories (for example, by using hashtags)
- Advocacy: spreading the message about water safety and drowning prevention.

CASE STUDY

Respect the Water

Respect the Water is the RNLI's national drowning prevention campaign, which forms a key part of the charity's approach to halving the number of accidental coastal deaths.

The campaign is primarily targeted at men aged 16-39, who account for the majority of coastal deaths each year. It aims to highlight drowning as an important and relevant issue in the UK and Ireland, emphasising the extent of the problem by using strong messaging, thought-provoking statistics, and real stories to encourage safer behaviour.

The campaign uses a multi-channel approach including cinema, outdoor, radio and online media around the UK and Ireland. The adverts highlight the potential dangers of the water to help people realise they are at risk. The core campaign message is that British and Irish waters are dangerously unpredictable and the messages focus on three main risks that catch people out:

- **Cold water shock can steal the air from your lungs and leave you helpless**
 - **The water can be unpredictable, with waves, tides and hidden currents that can drag you out to sea in seconds**
 - **Around half the people who drown never expected to get wet - many get caught out by unexpected slips, trips and falls into the water.**
-

To better understand water-related self-harm

In the period 2010-13 there were 725 suspected suicides identified in WAID, an average of around 180 suicides per year. This represents a significant proportion of water-related deaths.⁶⁹

There are currently a number of water safety and drowning prevention organisations involved in suicide reduction initiatives working through preventative and risk response models. The NWSF will learn from and build on the experience of these organisations.

This target is significantly linked to the current public health agenda and mental health outcomes. As such, we will work to align our work with this and focus on collaboration with expert organisations and bodies.

The delivery of this target, in the initial stages, will focus upon the following objectives:

- Developing stronger relationships with mental health and allied health experts, networks and advocates
- Utilising our existing data and intelligence to best effect
- Learning what can be done, and how we can further assist in community settings.

National Coasteering Charter

Coasteering is a popular and developing activity which involves traversing the intertidal zone, using a combination of scrambling, walking, swimming and jumping to complete the journey. In the Summer of 2007, primarily as a result of a number of incidents and near misses, members of the National Water Safety Forum considered the management and development of coasteering, and, in parallel, approaches to managing "tombstoning" incidents.

In response to these incidents, a joint project was launched involving RoSPA, RNLI, the MCA and RLSS UK. Under the direction of the NWSF beach advisory group, an industry working group was established involving around 120 organisations and individuals providing commercial coasteering services to the public.

Bringing the providers, regulators and rescue organisations together has been the key activity over the last few years. New and emerging sports often have local pockets of knowledge and excellent practice. Sharing this and embedding good practice was the objective, along with helping the industry to formalise the knowledge which was sometimes locked away.

Agreeing industry standards and common practice was no mean feat. Many of the providers had to sacrifice some of their hard-earned commercial experience and compromise. Many providers had first-rate standards and operations, which were beyond the capability "and knowledge capacity" of "some of the other companies". The working group addressed this by developing a "safe as necessary" standard which was achievable by the industry. Two documents comprising the agreed practice and information were the key outputs from this group. The guidance has proved influential and both documents have been adopted by the outdoor industry regulator.

The original industry group has now progressed from being an NWSF working group into the National Coasteering Charter (NCC) which now includes the majority of providers and training bodies. This group has developed the sharing and embedding of good practice across the sport.

All recreational activity organisations should have a clear strategic risk assessment and plans that address key risks.

Recreational activity on or near the water accounts for just under half of fatal incidents (45%). But when participation numbers are taken into account most activities present a low risk.

We believe that most watersport fatal accidents happen to non-members of the relevant governing bodies and moreover occur as a result of not following governing bodies' recommended good practice. There are clear advantages to participation through the governing body.

Sport governing bodies and organisations play a key role in demonstrating and spreading good practice, and this can be shared with their members. The NWSF recognises the expertise of governing bodies, and will continue to support their work to promote and ensure safe participation.

The way people participate in adventurous and recreational activities has changed; it is evident that many individuals do not align themselves with a governing body, choosing to be associated with local clubs, centres or informal networks. Advice is freely available over the internet and while the word "adventure" is regularly used for marketing purposes, it is not always associated with supportive water safety messages. Access to specialist sporting equipment has also changed. Shops have experienced staff available to provide advice and guidance to the novice or inexperienced, but online purchasing rarely has the same expertise available.

To deliver this target we will:

- act in a supporting role to assist governing bodies and organisations to promote a consistent approach and methodology to safety
- work with new and developing activity organisations on a case by case basis to ensure their approach to risk management is relevant, up-to-date and in line with national plans
- assist governing bodies and organisations to influence participants outside of their membership, including local communities and the general public, through the development of core safety messaging, and improving our understanding audiences and their behaviours
- support the sharing of best practice through our networks
- support efforts to increase safe participation.



5.

How will we
achieve our aim?

The following activities will support the delivery of the key targets:

Improving evidence and data

Continue to support and further develop WAID. In particular increase our understanding of causal and behavioural factors in fatal and non-fatal incidents. Use shared research programmes to better understand attitudes, behaviours and audiences. We will draw upon and develop the knowledge and expertise of individuals and organisations to ensure effective targeting and prioritisation of effort.

Supporting partners and networks

Coordinate and support organisations and individuals with a commitment to reduce drowning. We will develop new strategic partnerships with organisations and individuals, from within the life-saving sector and further afield.

Provide leadership and advocacy

Effective and sustained leadership is essential to ensure all organisations and individuals are working towards an agreed common goal. We will act as the central voice for the adoption and use of this strategy in the UK. We will oversee national and local water safety plans and activities.

Mobilise resources and sustained investment in drowning prevention

Creating and implementing a 10-year strategy will require a sustained source of income.

Measuring success

A range of indicators and accepted health promotion frameworks form the core of our performance monitoring. We will measure long-term impact through a reduction of absolute fatalities and declining trend in risk rates per population. We will measure medium-term outcomes through changes in behaviour among target audiences, reduction of risk in specific environments and geographic areas, and the adoption of national targets by key stakeholders. Shorter-term outputs will measure 1-3 year operational targets to drive implementation and progress towards the longer-term goals.

Once fully agreed these measures will be made publicly available, updated to a defined timescale, and form the core of our review process.

Our approach

It can be all too easy in the drive to create a safer environment to forget our wider responsibilities and values in terms of heritage, tourism and maintaining environmental aesthetics. We will continue to promote the benefits and enjoyment of water-related activities such as mental and physical health, encouraging social inclusion and building life skills, while at the same time focusing efforts on reducing the risk of drowning.

In developing and delivering this strategy the above values, and our long-standing published principles, will remain at the forefront of our thinking.⁽¹⁰⁾

In our practice we will be:

- Proportionate and balanced
- Evidence based
- Transparent
- Open and inclusive.

6.



Photo: RLNI/Adrian Don

How can
you contribute?



There is a wealth of knowledge, expertise and insight into drowning in the UK and separately we will have some impact. But by combining our resources and working towards a common aim we can realise the step-change needed to create a future without drowning.

The emphasis of this strategy is to act as a **call to action**. We are asking organisations and individuals to sign up to and shape the vision, aims and principles of this strategy and use the targets to guide their contributions.

To register your commitment email:
info@nationalwatersafety.org.uk



Photo: Stock image

Strategic Summary



PURPOSE	Prevent accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by working in partnership to ensure consistent guidance for the safe enjoyment and management of activities in, on and around water.
AIM	Reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50% by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities.
Why do we need a strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drowning in the UK is among the leading causes of accidental death; about 400 people accidentally drown every year • Worldwide, drowning claims the lives of 372,000 people every year • We need a step-change in our approach to tackling this challenge
Strategic themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities and environments • Demography • Recreational and everyday activities • Behaviours
What we intend to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child should have the opportunity to learn to swim and receive water safety education at primary school and where required at Key Stage 3 • Every community with water risks should have a community-level water safety risk assessment and water safety plan • To better understand water-related self-harm • Increase awareness of everyday risks in, on and around water • All recreational activity organisations should have a clear strategic risk assessment and plans that address key risks
How will we achieve our aim?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve evidence and data • Support partners and networks • Provide leadership and advocacy • Mobilise resources and sustained investment in drowning prevention • Measure success



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Abbreviations

ASA
Amateur Swimming Association

BSAC
British Sub-Aqua Club

CFOA
Chief Fire Officers Association

MCA
Maritime and Coastguard Agency

NWSF
National Water Safety Forum

Terminology

Activities

The defined actions that the forum intends to undertake in order to meet our overall aim.

Coastal/Inland

Manual geographic assessment of incident location.

Commercial activities

The activity of the deceased was recorded as commercial i.e. commercial fishing.

Drowning

The term "drowning" is used in this strategy as a collective term for water-related fatal events with an accidental or natural cause component. A number of these events may have associated injuries, such as impact from falls.

Environments

Locations in and around water - including inland and coastal locations such as canals, rivers, harbours and at sea.

Everyday activities

Grouped classification where the activity of the deceased was recorded as walking/ running, waterside/in water play, motor vehicle, climbing/cliff, cycling or recreational flying. The person involved, as far as we can reasonably determine, had no explicit intention to be fully in or on water.

Exceptional activities

Grouped classification where the activity of the deceased was recorded as animal rescue, flooding or person on ice.

Recreational water activities

Grouped classification where the activity of the deceased was recorded as a watersport or an activity in, on or around the water. This includes swimming, manually powered boats, angling, sub aqua diving, jumping/diving in, motor boating, sailing, surfing, windsurfing/kitesurfing, use of personal water craft or caving.

RLSS UK

Royal Life Saving Society UK

RNLI

Royal National Lifeboat Institution

RoSPA

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

WAID

Water Incident Database

WHO

World Health Organization

Risk

This is the chance that somebody could be harmed, together with an indication of how serious the harm is (fatal or non-fatal). We express this chance as both a number i.e. 1 in 10,000 people or hours of activity per year, or more simply as high, medium or low. In both instances we use accepted UK Government references and similar calculations for indicating tolerability.

Stakeholder

Any individual, organisation or community with interest in or responsibility for drowning prevention and water safety around the waters of the UK.

Strategy themes

The categories with the highest risk of drowning which will guide and focus the work of the forum in order to achieve the aspirational aim in drowning reduction.

Water-related fatalities

The term refers to all deaths in, on or near to water, to an extent to be considered water related. We consider these events in three broad categories; accidental and natural cause, suicide, and criminal activity. Each category includes a number of suspected or confirmed cases due to the uncertainties around data in this setting.