



national  
water safety  
forum

# #RespectTheWater

## 999 Campaign Report

### Executive Summary



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### About Respect the Water

Respect the Water's 999 campaign is the largest ever collaborative UK water safety campaign. Respect the Water (RTW) is a partnership approach to public-facing water safety campaigns in the UK. Historically owned by the RNLI, the RTW brand has been gifted to the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) and is supported by a network of over 50 organisations. In 2021, 277 people tragically lost their lives in UK waters due to accidental drownings in 2021, a staggering 62 per cent of which took place in inland waters, such as canals, rivers, reservoirs and lakes. The 999 campaign was developed to help reduce drownings, with a focus on high-risk inland locations and advising who to call in a water emergency.

### Empowering communities

Key messaging was developed using insights from NWSF members and Water Incident Database (WAID) risk analysis. Focusing on male bystander rescues, the key message was clearly presented: resist your instincts to try to save someone in trouble and instead call 999. Whilst acknowledging that bystander rescues tend to be predominantly male acts, the campaign targeted both males and females. And while the main target group was those aged between 15 and 49, the campaign messaging was clear on what to do in a water emergency, regardless of age or gender. The key messaging included raising awareness of the "Call – Tell – Throw Method". If someone witnesses a water emergency, they should call 999, tell the person in the water to float on their back, and then throw them something that floats.

### Breaking through the echo chamber

The NWSF worked with PR and broadcasting agencies to develop creative campaign assets (including a video advert for both TV and social media), launch the new Respect the Water website, and attract national media coverage across TV and radio. Throughout the campaign, many voices shared one message, breaking through the echo chamber, resulting in:



an audience reach of  
**8.6 million people**  
 (impacts) on live and catch-up TV

**4,000 visits**

were made to the website,  
 with **80 per cent** in the first 48 hours



**394 media outlets**

covered the campaign, including  
**33 TV stations in 48 hours** with a

**potential audience reach of 8.8 million**



the video advert  
 being viewed

**26,500 times on Twitter**

## Safer behaviours and knowlegde

Advert testing showed the 999 campaign had a positive impact on encouraging safer behaviours. Results show the greatest impact was on inland audiences and strong swimmers:



Before seeing the advert, **46 per cent would enter the water to attempt to save someone, compared to 27 per cent after seeing the advert.**



More males would call **999 after seeing the advert, rising from 56 per cent to 78 per cent after watching it.**



The overall impact of the advert was that **it enabled people to feel more confident in knowing what do in a water emergency.**

## “Do one thing” for drowning prevention (WHO)

The RTW 999 campaign was launched to coincide with World Drowning Prevention Day (WDPD), in response to the World Health Organization (WHO) asking organisations to “do one thing” to prevent drowning. The RTW 999 campaign was a key driver across the UK, connecting with many organisations. Over 25 well-known landmarks as well as emergency service buildings lit up blue across the UK for WDPD. Locations included The Kelpies in Falkirk, the Liver Building in Liverpool and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow. Being a part of this global initiative also enabled high visibility during a peak period of drownings in the summer.

## Future plans for Respect the Water

Following the success of the 999 campaign launched on WDPD, a debrief workshop was attended by NWSF representatives, where future plans for RTW were discussed. As part of a five-year strategic plan, next steps include using RTW all year round and supporting key water safety campaigns under the RTW umbrella. A key success component of the 999 campaign has been the ability to break the echo chamber and ensure water safety messages get into the public consciousness through large-scale media coverage. The NWSF is now seeking funding to create and amplify more water safety campaigns under RTW, whilst the network continues to collectively work towards the target of reducing drownings by 50% by 2026, as set out in the Drowning Prevention Strategy.





#RESPECT THE WATER

