



national
water safety
forum

A future without drowning:

The UK Drowning Prevention

Strategy

2016–2026

Review: 2024/25

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Development of the strategy review 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.



Foreword

Drowning results in a needless loss of life. Worldwide, 10.5 million “years of life” are lost each year. In the UK the corresponding figure is over 6,000. An even larger number of lives are changed permanently due to the morbidity resulting from drowning. These tragedies can be prevented by a concerted, co-ordinated and optimised collaboration between organisations sharing the common aim of eradicating drowning.

The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) was set up in 2004 following a Government review into water safety.

The high-level purpose of the NWSF is to provide a forum within which drowning prevention initiatives can be co-ordinated and optimised. Despite coming into existence in response to a Government initiative, and despite drowning being a leading cause of accidental death of UK citizens, particularly children, the NWSF has received very limited Governmental support, and drowning prevention is not part of any ministerial portfolio. This situation must change if the outstanding work of the NWSF is to be fully empowered and optimised. In both Wales and Scotland, devolved Government support for drowning prevention via Water Safety Wales and Water Safety Scotland has brought tangible benefits and results.

As with so many other areas, knowledge underpins drowning prevention: knowledge of risks, knowledge of ways of avoiding or mitigating those risks.

This knowledge must be acquired through research, and communicated effectively and comprehensively in order to educate all those at risk, thereby reducing the burden of drowning and the tragic loss of potential it represents.

In this review of the work of the NWSF you will read about the important initiatives that the NWSF, working with its partner members, has developed and introduced to help prevent drowning. Details of the progress made and work to be done are provided. The initiatives include: education; risk assessment and awareness; better understanding of self-harm; and strategic initiatives for recreational activity organisations.

This review highlights that the NWSF is facilitating advances in several areas of drowning prevention. I hope the reader fully appreciates the avoidable tragedy that drowning represents, and that this realisation motivates all, from Government to individuals, to get involved and to do something to help prevent drowning.

Professor Michael Tipton

Chair of the National Water Safety Forum

Background

The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) is a voluntary association of organisations that was set up following a government review into water safety.

Hosted by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), the NWSF includes sports governing bodies, search and rescue organisations, regulators, navigation and harbour authorities, local government, utilities, third sector organisations and other representative groups.

The UK Drowning Prevention Strategyⁱ (UK DPS) was launched in January 2016 with one main aim:

To reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities.

This review, which follows on from a Biennial Reviewⁱⁱ completed in 2018, provides an up-to-date analysis of the aims and objectives set out in the UK DPS. The review precedes the progression and development of the next iteration of the UK DPS.

Context

Ten years is a long time for a strategy to be in existence, and there have been several contextual changes during this time including the release of strategies in the devolved nations (covered later on pages 20-24).

Drowning prevention has seen increased prioritisation by both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations since the UK DPS was released. In 2021, the WHO named the 25th July as World Drowning Prevention Day and provided a number of recommendations for member states to improve water safety and drowning prevention.

Challenging circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic saw more people turn to outdoor leisure activities, including water-based activities, as a form of recreation. Restrictions on international travel meant more people chose to travel within the UK, increasing their use of both coastal and inland waterways.

The election of a new government provides an opportunity to reconnect Government and water safety, increasing the focus and commitment to this key area of public health at a national and international level. Water safety is an area in which simple interventions can make a significant difference in preventing the needless loss of life.

Although the aim of the UK DPS is to reduce the number of drownings in the UK by 50 per cent, one death is too many. The NWSF continues to work towards a future with no drownings.

Anyone can drown, no one should.



Progress made

Overall water-related fatality figures

To ensure the most up-to-date data analysis for the strategy review and the next iteration of the UK DPS, five-year WAID data was enhanced using coroner reports and inquest information. This enhancement project improved the WAID database, providing a more robust dataset. For more information, a full report has been published.ⁱⁱⁱ This has resulted in changes to overall numbers, outcomes and some fatality details (e.g. location, ages, sex) in comparison to the published data tables.

The total number of water-related fatalities over the most recent five-year period is presented below, along with the original UK DPS baseline of 676 fatalities¹.

The most recent five-year data (2019-2023) shows an average of 636 water-related fatalities per year in the UK. This is a 6 per cent decrease on the UK DPS baseline (see Figure 1). 2023 has seen the highest level of water-related fatalities over this five-year period.

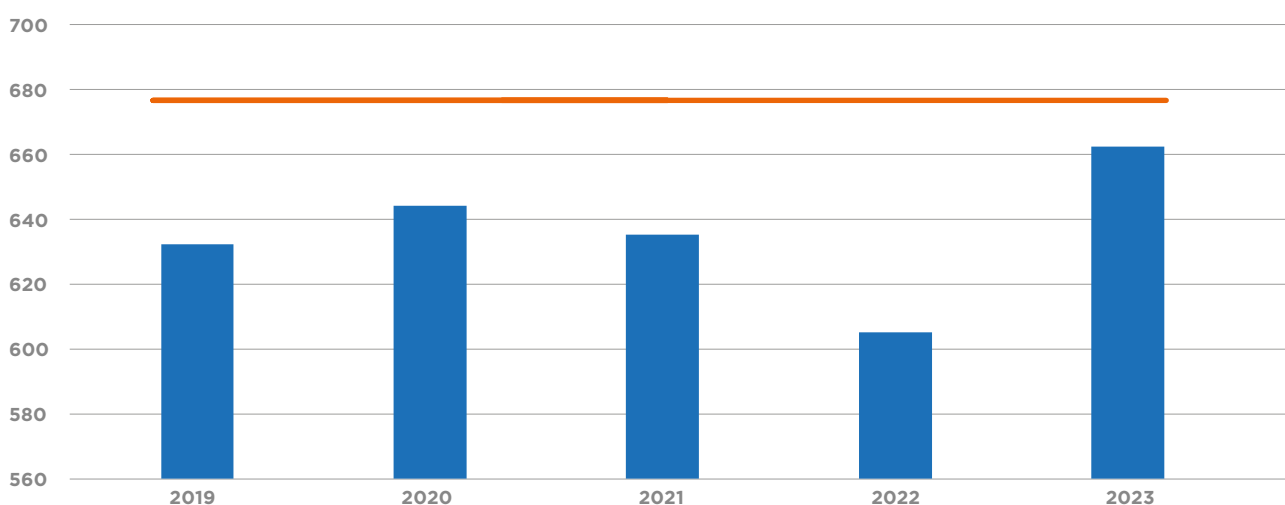


Figure 1. Overall water-related fatalities by year 2019-2023 vs baseline, UK

¹ The UK DPS baseline has been refined to provide a more specific baseline figure. This is based upon the same original dataset (WAID data 2010-2013) and shows an average baseline figure of 676 overall water-related fatalities – 395 of which were accidental.

Figure 2 provides a year-by-year overview of water-related fatalities and outcomes over the five-year period (2019-2023). As can be seen in Figure 2, accidental fatalities² consistently account for most water-related fatalities in the UK (44 per cent of all water-related fatalities, whilst suicide³ accounts for 38 per cent).

Looking specifically at accidental fatalities, Figure 3 provides an overview of accidental fatalities against the UK DPS baseline and the 50 per cent reduction target. Although accidental fatalities have reduced in comparison to the UK DPS baseline, the target has not yet been reached. Over the five years, the average reduction is 29 per cent. For country specific breakdowns, see Appendix 1.

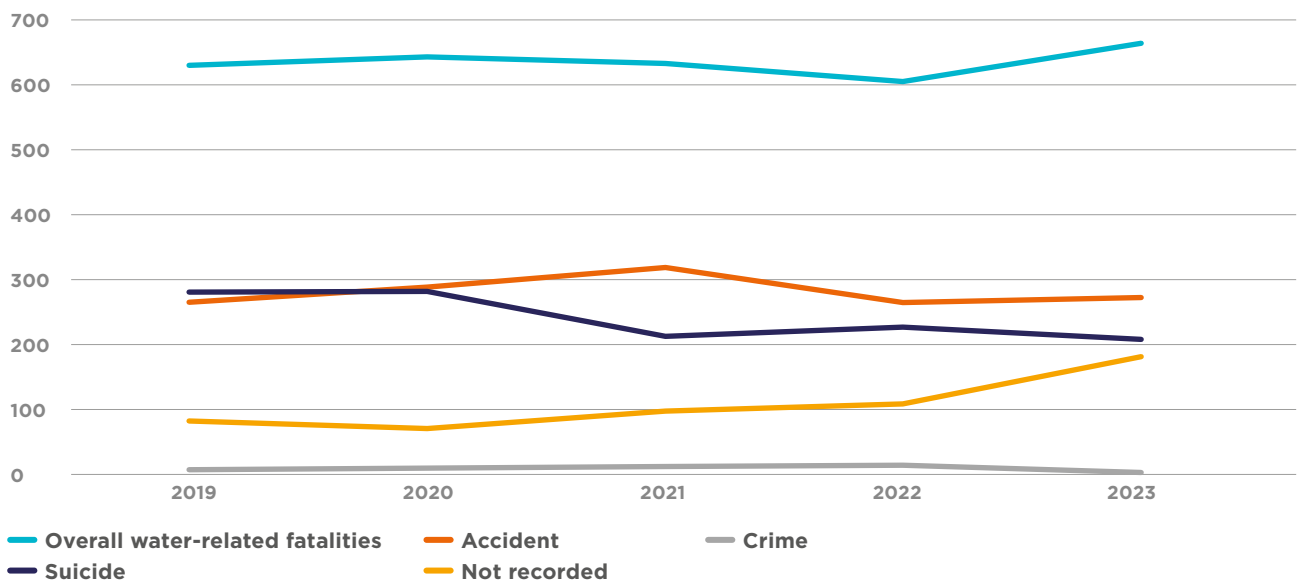


Figure 2. Overall water-related fatalities by year (2019-2023)

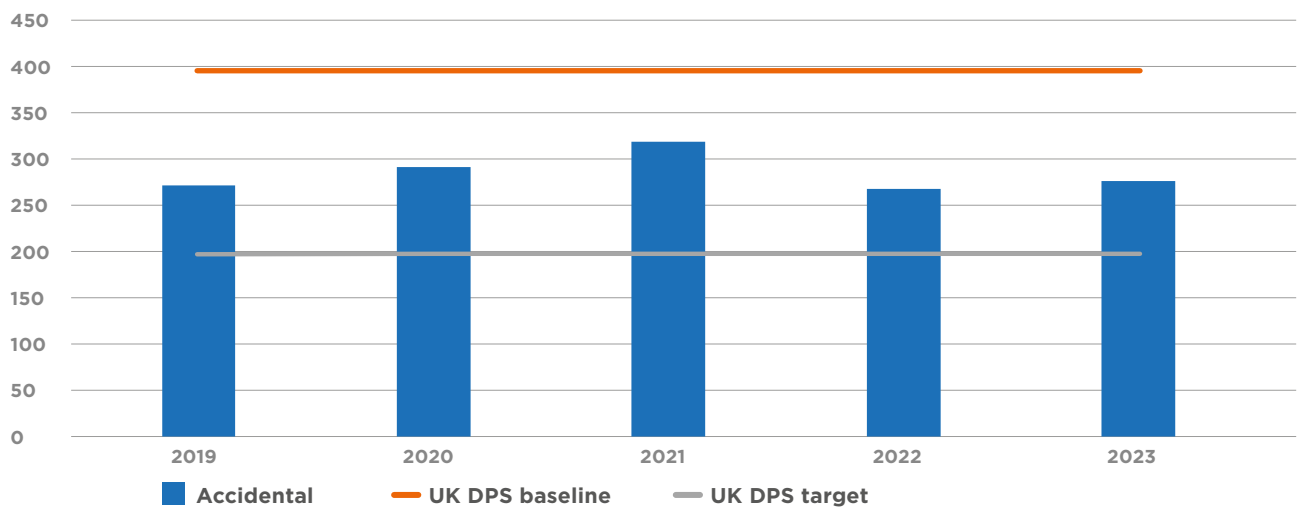


Figure 3. Accidental fatalities by year 2019-2023 vs baseline and target, UK

² Accidental refers to suspected/confirmed accidental and natural causes.

³ Suicide refers to suspected/confirmed suicide.



When considering the population, the overall rate of water-related fatalities has remained about the same - although 2023 saw a small increase (see Figure 4).

When looking specifically at accidental water-related fatalities, the five-year average data shows the UK rate has fallen in comparison to the original baseline. This is the case for all four nations of the UK (see Figure 5).

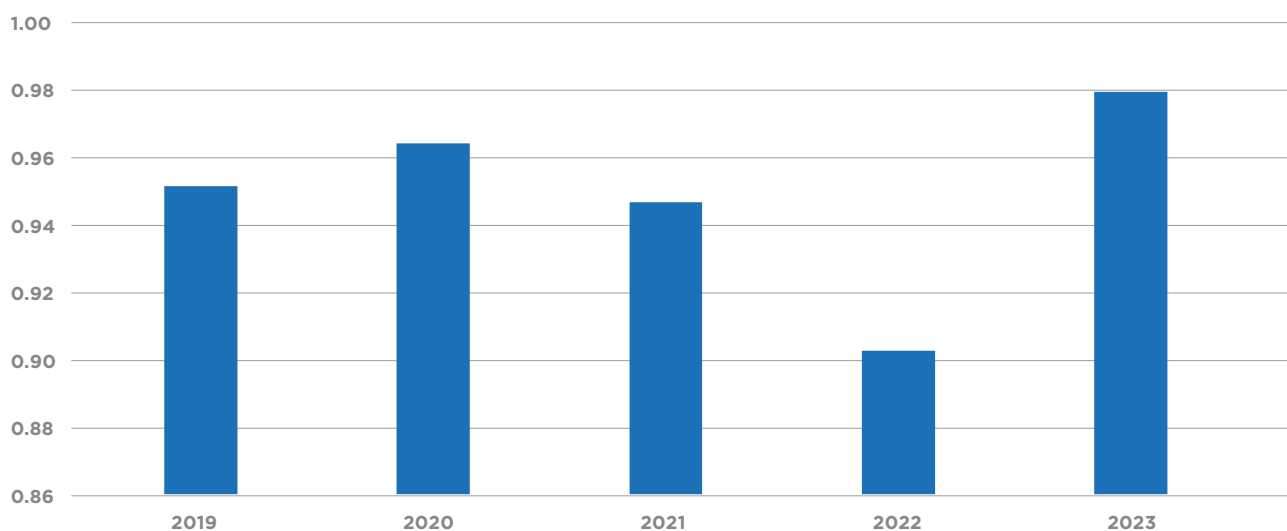


Figure 4. Overall water-related fatalities per 100,000 people by year 2019-2023

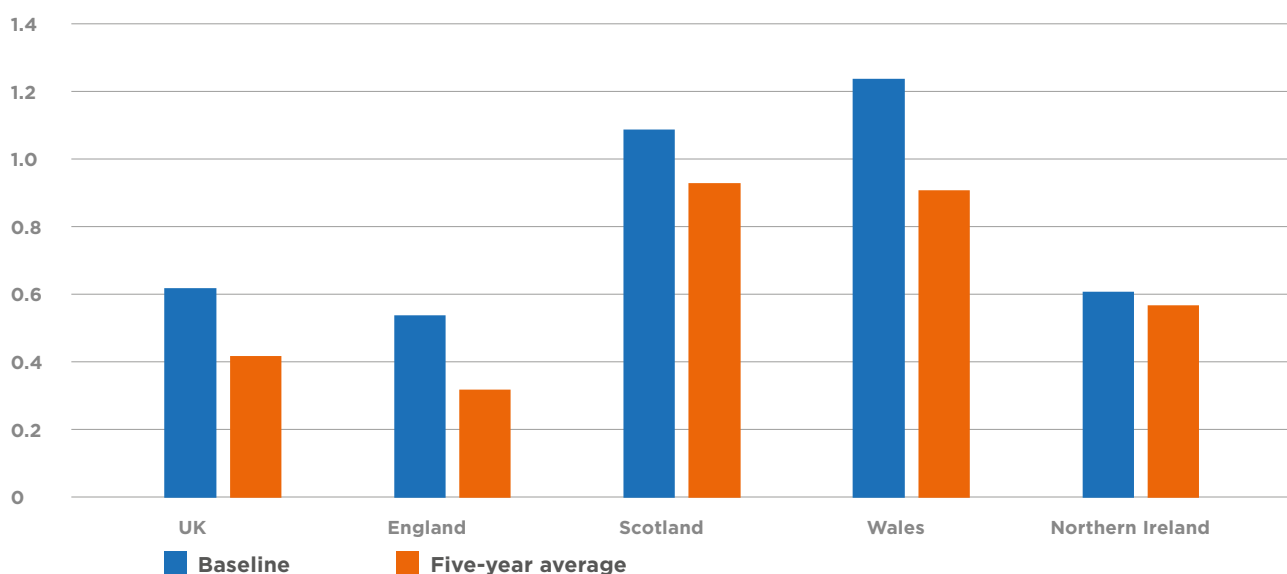


Figure 5. Accidental water-related fatalities per 100,000 people, five-year average (2019-2023) vs the UK DPS baseline (2010-2013)

Demographics

There have been very few changes to the core demographics of those that drown in the last five years in comparison to the original UK DPS baseline, as can be seen in Table 1.

	UK DPS baseline	2019-2023
Sex	81 per cent male; 19 per cent female	82 per cent male; 18 per cent female
Age group	Males aged 20-29; females aged 50-59	Males aged 20-29; females aged 50-59 and 20-29
Location	62 per cent inland; 38 per cent coastal	62 per cent inland; 38 per cent coastal
Behaviour	45 per cent recreational; 44 per cent everyday; 5 per cent domestic; 3 per cent commercial; 3 per cent exceptional ⁴	46 per cent recreational; 42 per cent everyday; 5 per cent domestic; 3 per cent commercial; 4 per cent exceptional

Table 1. UK baseline (2013-2015) demographics vs five-year data (2019-2023).

⁴ WAID taxonomies for activity include: recreational (sports and water-based activity); everyday (classified as those who did not intend to be in the water e.g. people who were walking, running and cycling next to water); commercial; and exceptional (e.g. person/animal rescue).



Progress on individual targets




- ✓ Activity complete
- ↑ Significant progress made
- ↗ Some progress made
- No change/no progress made
- ↻ Change in direction/no longer an intended action

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 knowledge, skills and experience in swimming and water safety contributes to their long-term safety in, on and around the water. In recent years, the NWSF Water Safety Education Working Group has brought together stakeholders in England to progress this key target through the following objectives.

<p>Work with key organisations to promote the importance of school swimming and provide support to schools and communities to implement the national curriculum standards</p>		<p>The Education Working Group members have worked in collaboration with the Department for Education to support more schools to teach water safety. Key achievements include the Water Safety Code⁵ being included in the draft statutory guidance for Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)^{iv}, support for Special educational needs, disability and swimming (SEND) inclusive lessons through the Inclusion 2024 grant,^v and 1.25 million children participating in Drowning Prevention Week in 2024.</p> <p>The School Swimming and Water Safety Charter^{vi} was also introduced to improve the quality of swimming and water safety lessons, and to raise attainment in schools.</p>
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⁵ Alternative versions of the Water Safety Code exist in Wales and [Scotland](#).

<p>All children to experience swimming and water safety in an open water environment through a defined programme</p>		<p>Over 175,000 7-14 years olds have taken part in Swim Safe sessions, an immersive programme in which participants learn and practice a range of open water competencies. Impact reports consistently demonstrate that knowledge of key messages has increased for both parents and children each year.</p> <p>This immersive swimming programme has been made more accessible through expansion to delivery partners working with school groups, and by embedding it into existing programmes such as the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Onboard programme.</p>
<p>Enable swimming providers to support the drowning prevention strategy through sign up to core water safety messaging</p>		<p>Members of the Education Working Group have further developed an education framework spanning all curriculum phases to support delivery of the Water Safety Code⁴, specific to England. This has been adopted by key partners and organisations and is curriculum linked.</p> <p>The Water Safety Code has been embedded into swim lessons as part of Swim England's Learn to Swim^{vii} programme.</p> <p>Swimming providers such as Everyone Active have piloted and successfully rolled out Swim Safe indoors. In the summer of 2024, sessions ran indoors at 140 venues. Further work is required to support all swimming providers.</p>
<p>Link this work to increasing awareness of everyday risks of water to ensure messaging reaches families as a whole</p>		<p>The NWSF Communications Advisory Group have worked together to target specific demographics through the #RespectTheWater campaign. See page 16 for a full case study.</p> <p>Member organisations have also developed their own water safety campaigns, including the RNLi's Float to Live campaign and Canal and River Trust's Water Safety for Little Explorers, highlighting the everyday risks of water.</p>



CASE STUDY

Effective application of “Float to Live” advice

“I heard the Float to Live advice in my swimming lessons. It just came to me in that moment. I was scared but I felt like I knew what to do.”

In September 2024, Billie, aged eleven, was at Avon Beach, Dorset with her family and friends when she was unexpectedly swept into deep water. Billie recalled the “Float to Live” advice from her swimming lessons and used it to stay afloat and call for help.

Volunteer helm Andy Read, who was off-duty and present on the beach, noticed the emergency and, along with another bystander, went to the aid of Billie and her friend. Their quick response and Billie’s confidence to relax and float were crucial in ensuring their safe return to shore

Public awareness of everyday risks and the importance of learning to swim

Billie’s story highlights the important contribution public safety campaigns, swimming lessons and water safety education make to drowning prevention efforts. Educating people about vital lifesaving skills such as ‘Float to Live’ does save lives, with Billie being one of over 50 people who have proactively contacted the RNLI since 2017 to say the survival skill helped save their life.

This case study highlights the importance of ongoing water safety campaigns and is a testament to the lifesaving potential of learning safe self-rescue techniques as part of swimming and water safety lessons.





Billie and Andy Read, RNLI Helm. “The beach is one of my favourite places – and I also love swimming.”

Credit: RNLI

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

To reduce the number of drownings, the UK DPS emphasised the need to approach communities as a whole. The NWSF's key focus has been on promoting the need for risk assessment and water safety plans/policies.

Ensuring communities have a standard methodology to work to		Inland ^{viii} and Coastal ^{ix} management guidance has been released, with significant distribution and promotion through NWSF members and the Local Government Association. Further work is needed to ensure these guidance documents are promoted to all relevant Duty Holders.
The NWSF and its members will support the building of risk profiles, assessments and capacity to respond		The NWSF released guidance on Water Safety Partnerships ^x and is currently mapping out where Water Safety Partnerships exist across the UK. High-risk communities have been targeted with increased communications support through the #RespectTheWater campaign.



CASE STUDY

Greater Manchester Water Safety Partnership

The Greater Manchester Water Safety Strategic Partnership (GMWSSP) is a multi-agency partnership project which supports a consistent approach to water safety across Greater Manchester. The project was created in 2023 in response to a steady increase in the number of fatal water incidents in the area, with the aim of helping residents and visitors to Greater Manchester enjoy water-related activities in a safe manner through information, education and practical initiatives at a local level.

The GMWSSP created a strategy which can be accessed [here](#). A key element underpinning this strategy has been the establishment of Water Safety Partnerships (WSPs) in all Greater Manchester boroughs. In 2023, five of 10 Greater Manchester boroughs had WSPs, all with varying levels of activity, support and funding. The GMWSSP established WSPs in the five remaining boroughs, as well as agreeing a consistent approach in the existing five. To do so, they worked with three key partner agencies in each borough – Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, Greater Manchester Police, and the local authority – facilitating meetings at which the approach, resourcing and commitment were all agreed, as well as basic functions such as terms of reference, frequency of meetings and the role of Chair.

The establishment of borough WSPs ensures that local partners can use their borough-specific knowledge to make informed water safety decisions at a local level. Meanwhile, national and regional bodies work with the GMWSSP to provide borough WSPs with strategy and direction, as well as key water safety messaging and campaigns that they can share with their communities. This structure is not intended to be hierarchical, but rather a reciprocal relationship of influence and support. Partner agencies are responsible to local leaders and elected members; in Greater Manchester, the WSPs report directly to borough Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). Comprehensive risk reviews are underway in all 10 boroughs, with the aim that every single significant water risk location in Greater Manchester will be inspected and assessed to form the basis of the Water Safety Action Plan.

Case study provided by: James Bridge, GM Water Safety Strategic Partnership.



CASE STUDY

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole: Water Safety Partnerships

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council sits along the South coast and covers 15 miles of coastline, as well as a number of rivers and inland water areas, encompassing several tourist destinations. They have made use of the NWSF Inland and Coastal Groups guidance (released January 2024) to successfully set up their own Water Safety Partnership (WSP).

BCP Council used this guidance to create a draft Water Safety Framework focused on drowning prevention. Helen Wildman, Head of Leisure and Events, described the guidance as “crucial” in giving BCP Council the foundation on which to build a systematic approach to water safety through cross-service collaboration.

The process involved identifying the user-base, profiling the area, and formulating a comprehensive communications plan for delivering key water safety messages to relevant audiences.

Case study provided by: Helen Wildman (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council).



Credit: BCP council



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

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

As part of this work, the NWSF champions member organisations' campaigns such as the RNLI's "Float to Live", RLSS UK's "Drowning Prevention Week" and Canal and River Trust's "Little Explorers". However, the NWSF also creates content where gaps and need are identified.

Advertising: large-scale channels that have the greatest reach to the target audience	↑	#RespectTheWater, which is a NWSF owned multi-channel campaign, was developed and launched in July 2022. Key messaging was developed using insights from WAID and focused on the key message "Call, Tell, Throw".
Ambient: thought-provoking materials to disrupt attitudes and to re-frame the risks	↗	Members of the NWSF have had successful experiential campaigns. The RNLI have used sand signage, art installations and safety equipment, like waterproof phone pouches, to help share campaign messages, whilst RLSS UK have also delivered resource packs for pubs and clubs for their "Don't Drink and Drown" campaign.
Media coverage: a core set of evidence-based safety messages will be available to those spokespeople undertaking media interviews	↑	The Communications Advisory Group have facilitated several successful media moments including stories about: The release of WAID data, World Drowning Prevention Day, August Bank Holiday weekend, and the increased risk of drowning during heatwaves. The most successful, World Drowning Prevention Day 2022, saw 394 media outlets covering the story, including 33 TV stations in 48 hours.
Social media: campaigns will use the viral nature of the internet and consistent terms to allow sharing of stories (for example, by using hashtags)	↗	The NWSF has produced several social media packs for inland water safety, flooding and ice safety messages. The following hashtags are consistently used: #DrowningPrevention #RespectTheWater
Advocacy: spreading the message about water safety and drowning prevention	↗	Several successful webinars have been held by the NWSF covering topics such as World Drowning Prevention Day, Flooding and Water Safety Partnerships. Government-focused engagement events have also been run. In 2022, the NWSF worked with the Coastal Communities All-Party Parliamentary Group to host an event in Westminster attended by MPs and representatives from WHO. RLSS UK have also worked hard to engage government through its Water Safety All Party Parliamentary Group in recent years.

CASE STUDY

Respect The Water

Respect the Water (RTW) was established in 2021 and is the NWSF's umbrella campaign brand for drowning prevention campaigns, supported by the Forum's network of over 50 organisations.

In 2021, 277 people tragically lost their lives in UK waters due to accidental drownings, 62 per cent of which took place in inland waters, such as canals, rivers, reservoirs and lakes. Respect the Water's 999 campaign was launched on 25th July 2022 – World Drowning Prevention Day – and was developed to help reduce drownings, with a focus on high-risk inland locations and advising who to call in a water emergency. This is the largest ever collaborative UK water safety campaign.

Campaign outcomes included:

- 394 media outlets covering the campaign, including 33 TV stations in 48 hours
- A new NWSF [Respect the Water campaign website](#) launched as a hub for NWSF member campaigns
- 8 million advert impacts on ITV during July 25th, with a further 600 k targeted impacts across ITV Video on Demand channels
- [Over 25 well known monuments and places turned blue](#) to show support for World Drowning Prevention Day.

The campaign was recognised as an example of best practice globally and was featured by the World Health Organisation in their 2022 [UN World Drowning Prevention Day round up webinar](#).

The campaign was also independently evaluated by [Innovation Bubble](#) to assess impact, highlighting the following positive results:




- Fewer people would enter the water to try and save someone else after seeing the campaign – a significant fall from 46 per cent before seeing the ad, to 27 per cent after
- More people said they would call 999 if they saw someone in trouble in the water, with males saying they'd call 999 rising from 56 per cent to 78 per cent
- The greatest impact was seen for inland audiences and strong swimmers, leaving both groups feeling safer and more confident.



Normanton Church goes blue. Credit: Richard Brown



To better understand water-related self-harm

Developing stronger relationships with mental health and allied health experts, networks and advocates		<p>The NWSF has published a position statement specific to suicide prevention in the water safety sector. Research has also been conducted to identify high-frequency locations for intentional drowning, which has been fed back to key organisations.</p> <p>Reports have also been delivered to 29 individual public health teams, leveraging their investment in life-saving appliances and informing the development of prevention plans.</p> <p>The NWSF was named in the government's Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan for England (2023) as a lead agency for organisations to engage with.</p>
Utilising our existing data and intelligence to best effect		<p>The NWSF have continued to collate and sensitively share 'suspected suicide' WAID data to help identify trends. Research has been undertaken to classify high-frequency locations, and members of the NWSF have taken part in a consultation exercise with the Transport Laboratory to inform the development of an integrated data set at locations of concern.</p>
Learning what can be done, and how we can further assist in community settings		<p>The NWSF has an agreed suicide prevention position and publication approach to suspected suicide WAID statistics. Taking part in the above activities has educated Forum members on how to work with the community, and how to communicate sensitively with stakeholders in this space.</p>

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 (46 per cent). But when participation numbers are considered, most activities present a low risk. Additionally, many accidents occur to non-members of the relevant governing bodies. Over the last eight years, the NWSF has been working, through the Recreation Advisory Group, to progress and develop the objectives set.

<p>Act in a supporting role to assist governing bodies and organisations to promote a consistent approach and methodology to safety</p>	<p>—</p>	<p>Most governing bodies have their own consistent approach and methodology to safety. There is currently no desire for one consistent methodology.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>➔</p>	<p>There has been an increased interest in water safety from NGBs over the past few years. Engagement with the NWSF is ongoing.</p>
<p>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 of audiences and their behaviours</p>	<p>—</p>	<p>The NWSF has not led this work, but individual NWSF members and countries have progressed this objective. For example, Water Safety Scotland released water activity codes, in partnership with the relevant NGB, and continues to promote these nationally and locally in communities.</p>
<p>Support the sharing of best practice through our networks</p>	<p>➔</p>	<p>Best practice is shared through individual NWSF members.</p>
<p>Support efforts to increase safe participation</p>	<p>➔</p>	<p>Awareness of safe participation has increased through improved communications from the NWSF, but more work is needed to develop this through the NWSF Communications Advisory Group.</p>



CASE STUDY

Stand Up Paddleboarding

Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP) has surged in popularity across the UK over the past few years, offering an accessible way to enjoy the water and connect with nature. This rise in SUP participation, however, has also led to an increase in significant incidents and emphasised the need for greater awareness of water safety.

Since 2020, there have been multiple incidents involving individual fatalities in various water environments and circumstances. In October 2021, four people lost their lives during a commercial SUP trip after becoming trapped in the hydraulic tow back of Haverfordwest Weir. The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) report into the incident strongly highlighted the importance of thorough risk assessments, proper training and qualification, and the need for clear and consistent safety advice.

Paddle UK (the national governing body for SUP) is working with a range of organisations – including RNLI, government offices and SUP manufacturers and retailers – to help raise awareness of safety. Activities include:

- Sharing key learnings from incidents among the paddle sport community to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future
- Working together to establish key safety messages and disseminating these to relevant audiences
- Developing a range of safety assets, including infographics and videos, to provide safety information to those new to the activity.

Through collaboration, these organisations aim to promote clear and consistent safety messaging to the wider SUP community to ensure that SUP continues to grow safely and sustainably.

For further information and more case studies, visit: [Safety Update | Paddle UK](#)

Case study provided by: Paddle UK.



Credit: Soak Lifestyle and Owin from Wong Shot Media

Approaches in the Devolved Nations

Water Safety Scotland

Following the release of the UK DPS, Water Safety Scotland (WSS) developed and released its own strategy in response to numerous Scotland-specific concerns and contextual factors. Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy (SDPS)^{xi} was released in 2018 by WSS and focuses on two key targets:

- Reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

SDPS has had regular reviews including the Two-Year Review^{xii}, the Interim Review^{xiii} and, most recently, the Six Year Review^{xiv}. With every review of the strategy, progress has been tracked and plans developed to ensure that WSS is on the right path towards meeting the targets of SDPS.

WSS has received support from the Scottish Government for its aims and objectives for the past decade and, most recently, support for water safety increased with the introduction of the Ministers Action Plan for Water Safety^{xv} in 2022, which compliments SDPS's targets and aims.

Over the six years of the strategy, WSS has achieved a significant amount of ground-breaking work. The Six Year Review^{xiv} details these achievements but the following highlights are noted:

- The creation and introduction of the Drowning and Incident Review (DIR) process. This pioneering process aims to establish the contributory factors of a drowning incident and look at potential measures that could prevent the reoccurrence of similar events
- The creation of age and stage appropriate water safety education resources – aligning to the Scottish curriculum
- An agreed national message and campaign for Scotland – the three step Water Safety Code. This has also been translated into 8 other languages
- Full communications toolkits for partners to use, including the creation of activity-specific advice codes with NGBs
- The introduction of Water Safety Signage Guidance^{xvi} and Unique Location Codes^{xvii} to create consistent water safety signage across Scotland
- The creation, development and implementation of Partnership Approach to Water Safety (PAWS) groups across Scotland. A PAWS group is a multi-agency framework for raising water safety awareness that combines the knowledge and experience of individuals and organisations in local communities that best understand their local risks. It links to the national strategic direction set by WSS, tying national efforts to local ones.



World Drowning Prevention Day Event 2023. Credit: Paul Watt Photography



The Kelpies by Scottish Canals on World Drowning Prevention Day

Water Safety Wales

In 2020, Water Safety Wales (WSW) published the Wales Drowning Prevention Strategy (WDPS)^{xviii} 2020-2026, which focused on seven key aims:

- Improve water incident data and intelligence in Wales
- Promote and develop learning to swim and water safety education
- Promote and support the development of water safety plans
- Promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure consistent messages reach the right people at the right time
- Promote the safe participation in water activities across Wales
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide
- Work with families affected by water-related incidents.

Significant progress has been achieved in delivering against WDPS aims, as detailed in the recently published Mid-Strategy Review^{xix}. Highlights include:

- Release of Wales-specific WAID reports and research with Public Health Wales on drowning in children and young people in Wales^{xx}
- Support to Swim Wales in advocating for learning to swim activities. The Education Subgroup is currently creating curriculum aligned education resources
- Existing water safety partnerships in Wales have been cited as good practice examples across the UK. WSW has undertaken research to build a baseline understanding of Local Authority approaches to Water Safety Plans, with a view to support councils in improving water safety in their areas
- The development of a WSW communications and campaigns plan
- Working with NGBS to encourage safe water activities, including supporting the development and implementation of recommendations for safety improvements in stand-up paddleboarding following the tragedy in Haverfordwest in 2021
- Working closely with the NHS Executive and Public Health Wales to collaborate on suicide and self-harm prevention at a national and regional level
- Working with families through Hosting the Families Group meetings.

Support for WSW has also improved at government level. In response to a petition started by the family of Mark Allen, who tragically drowned in 2018, the Senedd Petitions Committee made six recommendations as part of Mark Allen's Law, published in 2022.^{xxi} This included appointing a Minister (now Cabinet Secretary) to lead Welsh Government drowning prevention work. Additionally, the Welsh Government is providing ongoing financial support for WSW, enhancing its ability to achieve the seven key aims of the WDPS.



Northern Ireland

Water Safety Northern Ireland (WSNI) was formally developed and launched in late 2023, following exploratory meetings to ascertain the need and appetite for such a group.

The group is still very much in the early stages of development and are still seeking government support in principle with various Stormont Government departments. An interim Chair has been appointed to work to get the group established.

Three key focus areas have been agreed for prioritisation for WSNI:

- Promotion of a consistent and common approach to water safety
- Promotion of drowning prevention and water safety education and awareness to all communities
- Ensure a collaborative multi-agency approach to identify areas of risk through data analysis.





Conclusion and looking to the future

The NWSF acknowledges that progress has been made since the launch of the UK DPS in 2016. Despite this, there is still work to do and actions noted as 'some progress made' will continue to be prioritised over the next years to ensure successful implementation of the strategy. Work on the next iteration of the strategy is also due to begin in 2025.

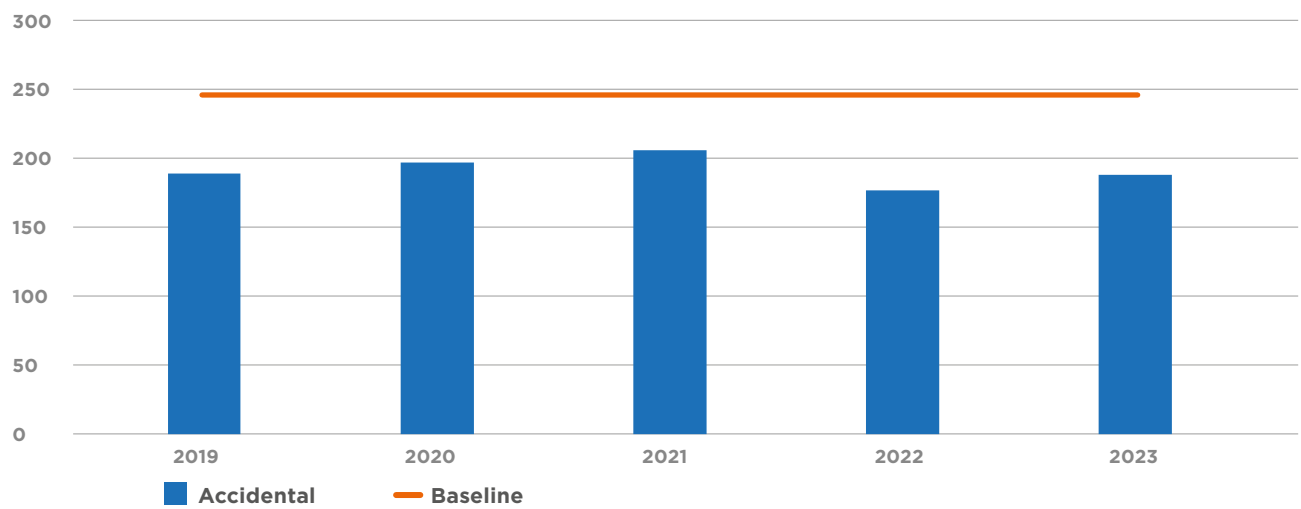
The NWSF is committed to reducing drowning fatalities and asserts that one death is too many. The NWSF will continue to work towards a future with no drownings.



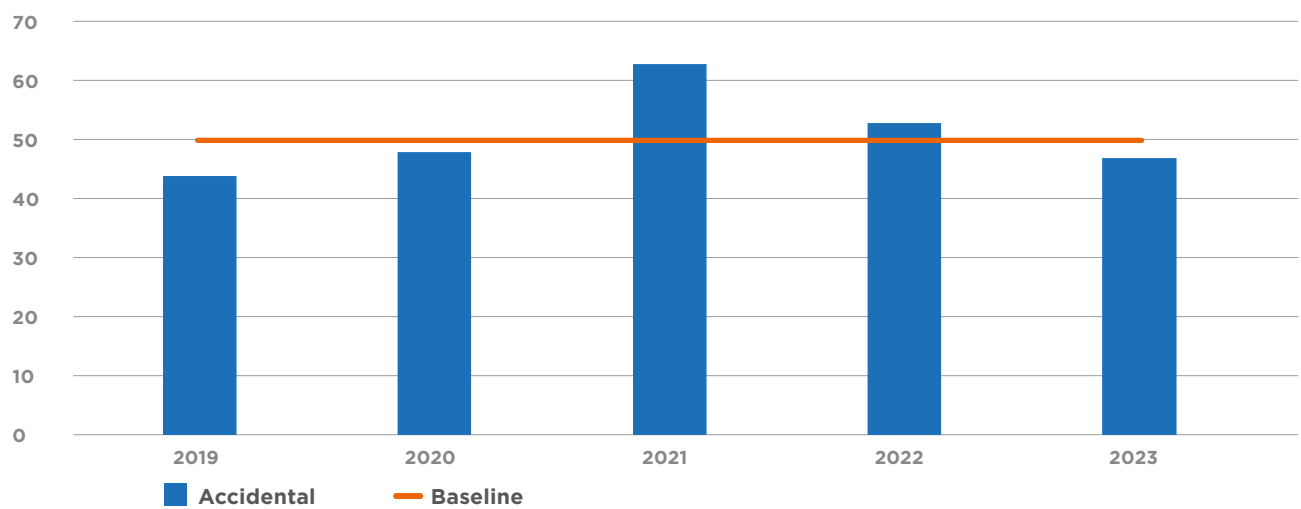
Appendix 1

Accidental fatalities broken down by country, years (2019-2023) and baselines.

Accidental fatalities by year 2019-2023 vs baseline, England

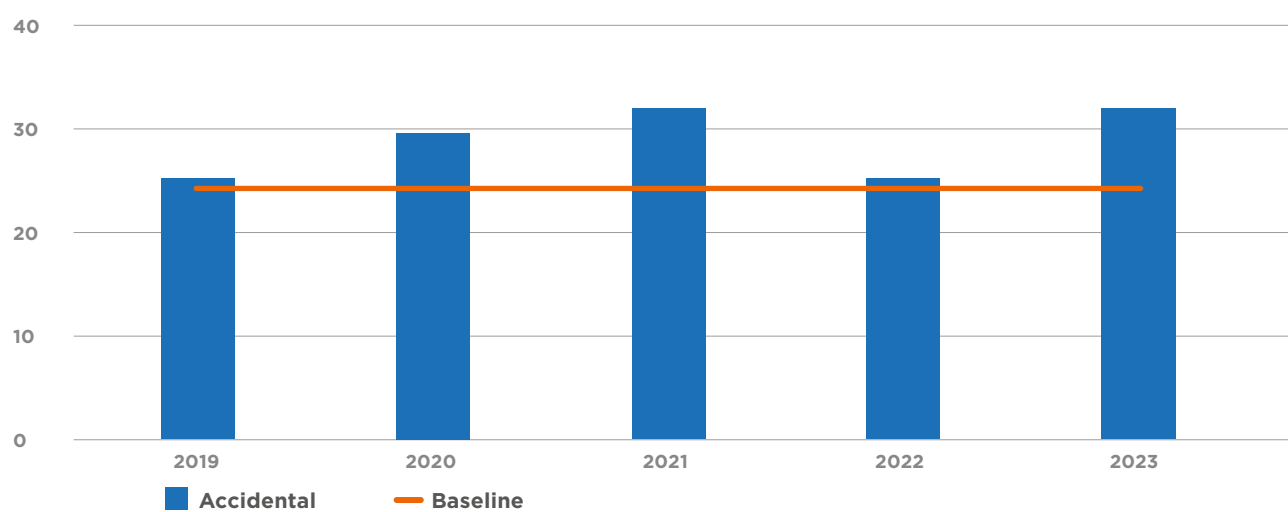


Accidental fatalities by year 2019-2023 vs SDPS baseline, Scotland

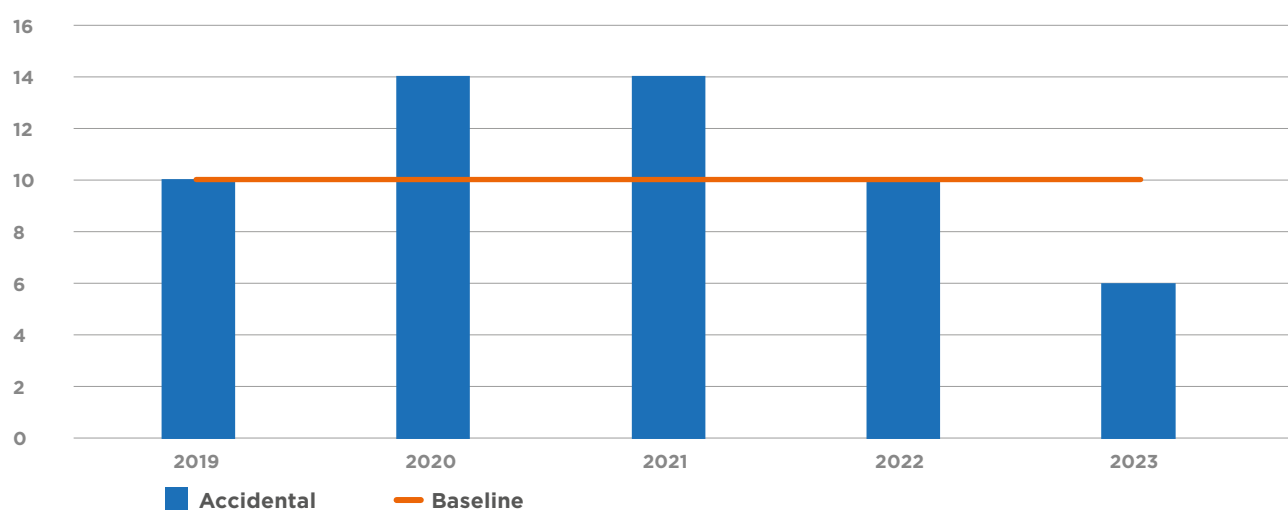




Accidental fatalities by year 2019-2023 vs WDPS baseline, Wales



Accidental fatalities by year 2019-2023 vs baseline, Northern Ireland



Notes on the data

- All data used are from WAID 2019-2023 (v2) unless otherwise noted
- Population rate figures use ONS mid-year data
- Baseline figures are as follows:
 - UK Drowning Prevention Strategy baseline: 2010-2013 WAID data
 - England baseline: 2013-2015 WAID data
 - Scotland baseline: 2013-2015 WAID data – as detailed in Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy (SDPS)
 - Wales baseline: 2016-2018 WAID data – as detailed in Wales’ Drowning Prevention Strategy (WDPS)
 - Northern Ireland baseline: 2013-2015 WAID data.
- 48 fatalities from the 2019-2023 dataset were ungrouped/excluded from the analysis. WAID taxonomies for activity include:
 - **Commercial activities** where the activity of the deceased was recorded as Commercial
 - **Domestic activities** where the activity of the deceased was recorded in a domestic/residential setting
 - **Everyday activities** which is classified as those who did not intend to be in the water (e.g. people who were walking, running and cycling next to water)
 - **Exceptional activities** where the activity of the deceased was recorded as exceptional e.g. person/animal rescue
 - **Recreational** where the activity was recorded as sports or a water-based activity.



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