national water safety forum

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Informal dips and festive swims

Guidance for organisations and event organisers



Photo credit: RNLI

Community dips, festive swims and other informal open water-based gatherings are becoming increasingly popular across the UK. While these events can bring people together and encourage participation in outdoor activities, they also raise important considerations around safety, responsibility and liability.

The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) recommends that anyone promoting, coordinating, organising or leading a water-based event to familiarise themselves with relevant event safety guidance, including **The Purple Guide**, the UK's recognised guide to health, safety and welfare at events. This guidance highlights key safety considerations for organisations and individuals involved in informal water-based events and signposts to recognised event safety guidance and good practice.

Events taking place in, on, or near water should have appropriate safety planning, risk assessments, and emergency arrangements in place. This should include oversight from a suitably competent person responsible for event water safety. Well-organised events aim to provide a safe environment for participants and help ensure water-related risks are identified, assessed and managed effectively. Where appropriate, organisers should also consider whether existing water safety assessments of the site are available, or whether specialist advice is needed to understand the hazards associated with the water environment.

Organisers should ensure that those responsible for planning and delivering the event have the appropriate knowledge, skills, training, equipment and experience. This may include specialist event water safety training, from recognised providers such as Surf Lifesaving Great Britian (SLSGB), the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS UK) or Safety Training Awards (STA).

Organisations operating at, near, or in the vicinity of an event should be aware that the presence of branded personnel (including fundraisers), vehicles, boats, rescue equipment, lifeguards or other water safety assets may unintentionally create the impression that the event is being supported, endorsed, supervised or safety-managed by that organisation. This perceived association can lead participants to assume that the event has been formally assessed and that additional safety measures are in place, even when this is not the case. Organisations should therefore take reasonable steps to ensure their role, level of involvement, and responsibilities are clearly understood by both event organisers and participants.

Further Information: The Purple Guide

For information on assessing and managing risks at inland and coastal water sites, including guidance on water safety risk assessments, see RoSPA's guidance on managing safety around inland and coastal waters.

For further information on event water safety planning and management, contact a recognised organisation with expertise in event management and water safety, or contact the NWSF.