

Press release

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Figures reveal number of drowning deaths in Scotland in 2019

A total of 96 people drowned in Scottish waters in 2019, new figures reveal.

New data from the National Water Safety Forum show an increase last year, from a total of 78 drownings in 2018.

Of drowning deaths in 2019, 37 were the result of accidents or natural causes – which is significantly down on previous years' figures.

The figures have been revealed as Water Safety Scotland (WSS) releases a report into how the country is performing against Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy, which was published by WSS in 2018. The strategy has two main targets – to reduce accidental drownings in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026, and to contribute to a reduction in water-related suicide.

The two-year report, released today, details areas in which significant progress has been made against the strategy's objectives, such as an increase in the number of local authorities with water safety policies, but also outlines areas which need further work.

Michael Avril, chairman of WSS, said: "We're disappointed about the increase in the number of water-related deaths in 2019, because the fact is that each one is preventable, and has a devastating impact on the loved ones and communities of those who have died.

"As lockdown restrictions start to ease, we're urging everyone to pay careful attention to and stick to the new rules to ensure they are safe when undertaking any exercise or leisure activity on or near our country's coastline and waterways. If you are on the coast do not take unnecessary risks, make sure you are aware of your surroundings and are conscious of any hazards. For example you should check tide times, keep dogs on leads near cliffs and be mindful of where you are walking.

“The water temperature around both Scotland’s coast and in inland bodies of water remains cold throughout the year; sudden or prolonged immersion in cold water can cause cold water shock and lead to death for even experienced swimmers.”

Ash Denham MSP, Community Safety Minister, said: “The Scottish Government takes the issue of water safety very seriously and wholeheartedly supports the work of Water Safety Scotland (WSS).

“We will continue to work closely with WSS and key partners to explore opportunities to progress initiatives that will help reduce deaths from accidental drowning.”

If you are taking your lockdown exercise on or near any of Scotland’s coastlines or waterways, then remember:

- Stop and think – Spot the dangers. In particular be aware of cold water shock, which will strike even at this time of year
- Stay together, stay close
- If you see someone in trouble in the water, do not go in – call 999 or 112 and ask for the fire service or the coastguard. If possible, look for a throw line or life ring.

For more details on the latest figures and to view the two-year review of the strategy, see www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/strategy/

Notes to editors

Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy targets a reduction of 50 per cent in the number of accidental drowning deaths, against a three-year average baseline of 97 (from 2013-2016). The strategy can be viewed at www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/strategy/

The two-year review of the strategy was led by RoSPA.

For more water safety advice, see www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/media/1612/water-safety-staying-safe.pdf

You can also view WSS’ recent Preventing Future Fatalities Report, which was published in March and brings together information on the current legal landscape and explores potential solutions to drowning prevention, at www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/media/1615/preventing-future-fatalities.pdf