

Press release

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Water Safety Scotland urges people to take precautions as incident data shows an increase in water-related fatalities

Water Safety Scotland (WSS) is urging people across Scotland to 'Respect the Water' when visiting and enjoying its waterways and coastlines.

This call comes at a time when the latest figures from the Water Incident Database (WAID), which is maintained by the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), revealed that there were 99 water-related fatalities in Scotland's waters, with 39 due to accidental drownings in 2020.*

79% of accidental fatalities happened at inland waters. This is a significant change from previous years, which have seen most accidental fatalities happen at the coast.

With drownings across the world currently in the spotlight after the United Nations (UN) recent General Assembly, there are growing concerns emerging with the announcement of these new figures.

As [Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters 2021](#) is in full swing, WSS is keen to support people getting out and enjoying Scotland's waterways with safety at the forefront of any activities.

In line with the NWSF 'Respect the Water' campaign, WSS is asking members of the public to [follow Scotland's Water Safety Code](#) wherever they are in Scotland, and have, as a result, created [a new webpage](#) to support the 'Respect The Water' campaign.

WSS highlights the following key pieces of advice in [its Water Safety Code](#):

- Stop and think - spot the dangers
- Stay together, stay close

- Know what to do in an emergency

Michael Avril, Chair of Water Safety Scotland said: “Every fatality in Scotland massively impacts the persons friends and family and we at Water Safety Scotland will continue to do everything within our powers to prevent future tragedies.

2020 was an exceptionally difficult year in so many ways and the increased number of drowning fatalities may have been caused by a number of factors. Water Safety Scotland will continue to work in partnership to carry out prevention activity and to better understand the causes of these tragedies. We ask everyone to come together in Scotland to support the #RespectTheWater campaign and follow Scotland’s Water Safety code.”

With Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy in its fourth year, the four-year review of the strategy will be published next spring along with a planned RoSPA Water Safety Conference.

This year’s WAID statistics also includes a fatality figure from suspected suicides. The figure for Scotland in 2020 was 28, with the Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy average being 29.

Rachel Cackett, Executive Director for Samaritans Scotland and chair of the Water Safety Scotland’s Suicide Prevention Subgroup, said:

“Suicide accounts for around 1 in 3 water-related fatalities in Scotland every year. Working to understand and reduce the risks of suicidal behaviour around Scotland’s waterways is important both for suicide prevention policy and for realising the overall aims of Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy.

Today’s figures are a reminder that it’s vital we continue to work with partners across national and local government, health, emergency and first response services, and the third and voluntary sector to develop knowledge and insight around suicidal behaviour around water-ways, and that we carry on working together to strengthen prevention and intervention.”

To view and download the WAID tables visit:

<https://nationalwatersafety.org.uk/waid/annual-reports-and-data>

To view WSS’s annual trend report visit:

<https://www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/media/1758/waid-2020-trend-report.pdf>

Notes to editors

*This increase should be set against a longer term trend in the reduction of accidental drownings. 2020 has seen an unusual level of visitors to Scotland's coastline and waterways due to the impact of COVID-19.

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The WAID water-related fatal accident report compiles data from a variety of sources to determine the legal and medical 'outcome'. The 2020 report has a higher number of 'not recorded' reports which may cause the 39 figure to be revised upwards when further information available.

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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 50 (from 2013-2015). The strategy can be viewed at www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/strategy/

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This year's WAID statistics includes a fatality figure from suspected suicides. The figure for Scotland in 2020 was 28, with the SDPS average being 29. Please refer to Samaritans' media guidelines when reporting on suicide. Read the guidelines [here](#).