

RNLI SUMMER CAMPAIGN TO RESPECT THE WATER

The RNLI's annual national drowning prevention campaign – Respect the Water – which runs throughout the summer months, will highlight the risk of accidental drowning when people are near the coastline.

The charity's latest campaign, which is encouraging safer behaviour by members of the public, both in and around the water, is primarily targeting males aged between 16 and 39 but the same advice is relevant for anyone visiting the coast.

Coastal fatality figures released by the RNLI show 26 people have lost their lives around the coast of Northern Ireland in the past five years. There was a number of near-fatal incidents, with the RNLI's lifeboat crews in Northern Ireland saving eight lives and rescuing 269 people in 2015.

Between 2011 and 2014, men accounted for nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of the region's coastal deaths. A surprising trend is that many of the coastal deaths each year are people who never planned to enter the water.

Of the 26 deaths over the five-year period, 42 per cent consisted of people taking part in activities such as coastal walking or running, or commercial activity. In fact, slips and falls while walking and running were the biggest contributing factors, accounting for nearly one-fifth (19 per cent) of the fatalities.

DANGERS OF COLD WATER

Other activities commonly contributing to coastal deaths around the region over the past five years are general leisure use of the water, including swimming and jumping in.

These accounted for 23 per cent (six) of the deaths, while people in the water but whose activity was unknown accounted for 19 per cent (five).

The RNLI is warning of the key dangers that can lead to accidental drowning – cold water, unexpected entry into the water, and rip currents and waves.



The campaign will reinforce the key message 'Treat water with respect, not everyone can be saved' on a range of channels throughout the summer. These include a poster showing dramatic imagery of the hand of a drowning person reaching for a lifebuoy, in addition to hard-hitting cinema advertisements showing the unpredictability of the water and the dangers of cold water shock.

According to Rogan Wheeldon, RNLI Community Incident Reduction Manager, "Each year RNLI lifeboat crews and lifeguards rescue hundreds of people around the coasts of Northern Ireland but sadly, not everyone can be saved. The real tragedy is that many of these deaths could have been prevented."

He pointed out that people often don't realise how cold our waters can be. "Even in summer months the temperature rarely exceeds 12 degrees, which is cold enough to trigger cold water shock.

"If you enter the water suddenly at that temperature, you'll start gasping uncontrollably, which can draw water into your lungs and cause drowning. The coldness also numbs you, leaving you helpless – unable to swim or shout for help."

He advised that when planning to enter the water "be aware that, even if it looks calm on the surface, there can be strong rip currents beneath the surface, which can quickly drag you out to sea. The sea is powerful and can catch out even the strongest and most experienced swimmers."

For information on coastal hazards, how to keep safe, and what to do should someone else end up in trouble in the water visit www.rnli.org/respectthewater