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Investigating Drowning Deaths in the United Kingdom

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Investigating Drowning Deaths in the United Kingdom
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“Any Police Officer or Police Staff member could be called upon to assist a member of the public in a water emergency. Many would not think twice about putting their safety second to attempt to save a life of another. The oath we take to protect life and limb can present an officer with difficult moral decisions when faced with a water emergency.

The public will always expect the first responder, normally from the Police Service, to be able to do ‘something’ to help.”

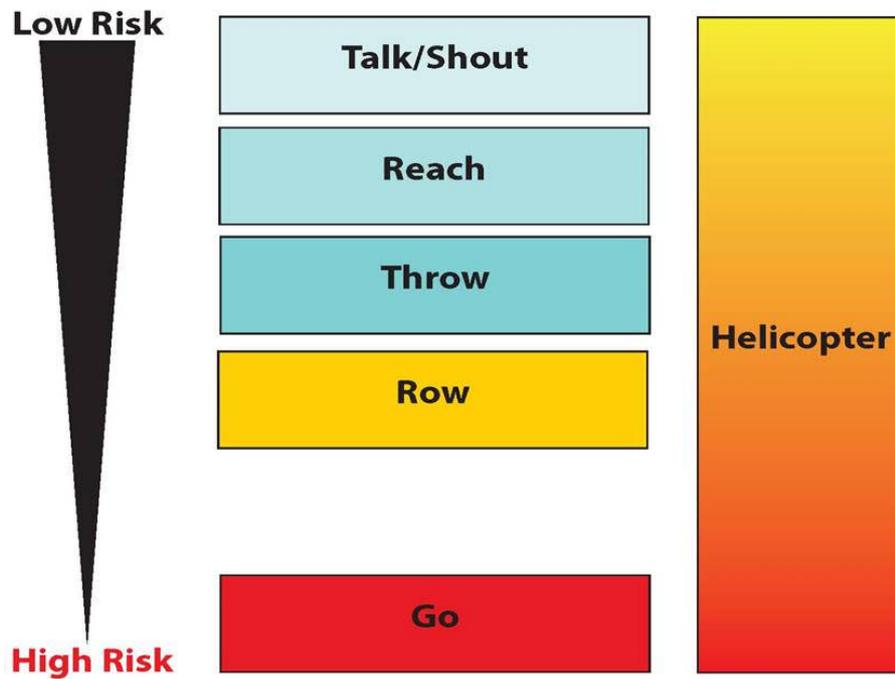
Working Near Water (Association of Chief Police Officers)

Police Officers and staff need to be made aware of the inherent dangers of water, safe working practices and correct use of Personal Protective Equipment - before dealing with such eventualities. Every year lives are risked and lost in effecting water based rescues.

Each individual Police Force has many differing variables in landscape, population, coast, climate and resources. This coupled with differing resources available to them, such as Marine Units, or Underwater Search Teams. Yet one thing is constant that as a First responder Police Officers and Police Staff are attending potentially life-threatening incidents and are faced with the challenges of “dealing with” a specific or a series of incidents and trying to protect and save members of the public in hazardous situations. As first responders, Police Officers should be trained sufficiently to Risk Assess a water-based incident.

The first point of call for any water-based incident should always be the Fire and Rescue Service, the experts in water-based incidents. There can be delays in arrival and in times of major incidents, resources will be stretched. The specialists maybe some time away and the actions of the Police First Responder could potentially save a life. If the attempted intervention is reckless, it has the potential to endanger more lives, including those of Police Officers and Staff.

When a Police Officer or Staff member is at the scene of a water-based incident and is under pressure to act, judgment can become clouded. Our duty is to protect life, and the public expectation is that the first responder will assist in a water emergency. Training and guidance should be provided to staff so that their first actions are not only safely assisting the casualty, but are also keeping themselves and their colleagues from harm. Often referred to as the ‘hierarchy of rescue options,’ this guide follows a low to high risk range of operational choices that can be employed to affect a rescue; this guide should not be used in isolation and should be balanced against an assessment of the effectiveness of the chosen option against the individual circumstances of the incident.



Assistant Chief Constable Paul Anderson was instrumental in the development of the first Association of Chief Police Officer's guide when working on or near water in the police service. Now based in Scotland he has experience of both England, Wales and Scottish approaches to drowning incidents. He is a former commonwealth medal winning canoeist and is Commander for Tayside with all the water sports activities under his area of responsibilities.