



national
water safety
forum

WATER SAFETY PRINCIPLES

FUNDAMENTALS

RESPONSIBILITY

PARTNERSHIP

AWARENESS

COMPETENCE

COMMUNICATION

PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING WATER RELATED RISKS

These principles have been developed from the VSCG managing visitor safety principles and work undertaken by members of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) and RoSPA. The guiding principles were specially developed with the visitor in mind, therefore the level of assumed risk and protection afforded needs to be considered using a different matrix than that applied to an occupational situation or premise.

There are occasions where the application of a control measure (such as a barrier, sign, enforcement policy) will be in conflict with some of the users desires. The assessment undertaken will therefore need to consider the benefits of the location/activity as well as balancing the potential impact in terms of safety gains and possible negative impact of changing the site or activity. In application, it is vital to approach each site on a risk led basis, and consider those groups particularly at risk.

As highlighted later different groups will have different risks; the level of voluntary accepted risk will also be different, in addition to the perception of that risk! When considering the level and extent of responsibility a duty holder owes, there is a clear difference to be acknowledged in respect to people that are employed by the duty holder, and those people who are visiting or using the premises lawfully.



WATER SAFETY PRINCIPLES

INTRODUCTION

The National Water Safety Forum and its specialist Advisory Groups deal with a very wide range of water related activities and risks to people, the environment, and economic activity. Each of these activities and their associated risks in turn involve a number of different persons or organisations with responsibilities or interests (the stakeholders) ranging from participants in water related activity, to responsibilities for managing a facility or waterspace. Devising safety management arrangements which are fair, proportionate, and consistent for all these stakeholders can be complex and achieving a consistency of approach across the range of water-related activities even more so.

Against this background, the Forum decided it needed a set of Principles which would assist in its prime objective of providing a 'one stop shop' for water safety advice by setting down the basis on which advice and guidance could be framed.

The Principles set out below are based on established risk and safety management principles and practice. In particular they draw on the following:

- **HSE Reducing Risks, Protecting People (HSE: 2001)**
- **Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group – Guiding Principles (VSCG:1998)**
- **Greater London Authority – Principles for Water Safety (GLA: 2001)**
- **The Principles of Good (Better) Regulation (Better regulation Task Force)**
- **The Principles of Managing Risks to the Public (HM Treasury and Cabinet Office 2005)**
- **Case law**

The Principles are written primarily for the guidance of the NWSF Co-ordinating Group and the NWSF Advisory Groups in their role as providers of a focal point for water safety advice and guidance. They should also be of assistance to others with interests in water safety issues wanting to know more about the way in which the NWSF reaches its decisions.

Organisations with statutory responsibilities should take these Principles into account when developing their arrangements for risk management within the limits of their statutory responsibilities and powers.

Similarly, organisations such as sports governing bodies and special interest groups who represent participants and have influence over many aspects of development of their water-related activity, should take these Principles into account in their work.

These Principles have been approved by the Government Inter-Departmental Group on water safety.

THE LEVEL OF RISK IN WATER RELATED ACTIVITY

The lack of consistent, comprehensive and reliable nationwide incident data is well recognised and the improvement of this situation is a major area of work for the Forum. Nevertheless, based on evidence collected by Forum members we can say with some confidence that the risks of personal injury across the range of water-related activities fall within the area defined by the HSE as the ALARP (As Low As Reasonably Practicable) region. That is, the risks can be considered "tolerable" since they are not so small that they can be accepted as they are with no further effort to reduce them, neither are they so great as to require activities to be banned or severely restricted. The job of all those with responsibilities for water safety, including the participants, is to manage the risk down to a level that can be said to be reasonably practicable taking a balanced view of the benefits, and the level of risk and the disbenefits (including cost) of reducing it.

BENEFITS OF WATER RELATED ACTIVITY

There is a wide range of benefits arising from water-related activities that should be taken into account when determining the cost effectiveness, fairness, consistency and proportionality of risk control measures. These include:

- **Health and fitness agenda.**
- **Access to countryside and coast.**
- **Encouraging social inclusion.**
- **Building life skills. Acquiring the skills necessary for individuals to be aware of risk and be able to deal with it.**
- **Economic advantages of access to water spaces.**
- **Access for persons with disabilities.**
- **National sporting and physical activity objectives (Department of Culture, Media and Sports).**

These are grouped into six areas. Note: For the purposes of these principles, 'managing organisation' means any organisation, public, private, or not-for-profit, which has responsibilities in law for some aspect of managing water-related activity. This would include amongst others swimming pool managers, navigation authorities, parks authorities, local authorities, recreational facility managers, outdoor activity centres, riparian landowners etc.

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The principles in detail are as follows:

RESPONSIBILITY

- No activity can be made completely risk-free.

PARTNERSHIP

- Risks imposed on non-participants and over which they have little or no awareness or control, can only be accepted if they are very low. (The principle of the voluntary acceptance of risk - no nasty surprises).

AWARENESS

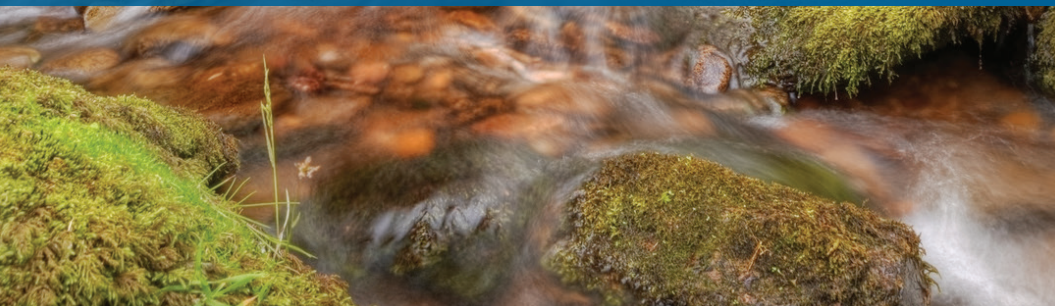
- All the benefits of water-related activities will be taken into account when making the balanced judgement of whether risks are acceptable or further risk control measures are necessary. (These benefits will include amongst others health and fitness, access to the countryside and coast, social inclusion, economic development, disability access and sporting objectives).

COMPETENCE

- As above, all the disbenefits and costs of water-related activity will similarly be taken into account. (These include provision of rescue services, access restrictions, transfer to riskier activities (e.g. swimming in docks when pools close)).

COMMUNICATION

- As far as possible, avoid restricting access to water spaces or facilities.
- Look ahead by assessing the risks that can be foreseen.
- Learn from the past. (Records of accidents, near-misses and ill-health, together with reports from the participants inform present day decision-making).
- As far as possible, avoid additional regulatory controls. (These should only be considered where accident rates are high, multiple casualties occur, children or elderly or disabled persons are involved, the risk is unclear to participants or affects non-participants (i.e. an involuntary risk)).



WATER SAFETY PRINCIPLES



RESPONSIBILITY

The principles in detail are as follows:

PARTNERSHIP

- **It is important to strike a balance between the self-reliance of the individual participant and management interventions.** (The greater the competence and risk-awareness of the participant, the greater the scope for the managing organisations not to intervene. Many benefits of water-based activities can be realised by encouraging self-reliance, not dependency on a managing organisation).

AWARENESS

COMPETENCE

- **Everyone involved in a water-related activity has some responsibility for ensuring their own safety.** (Includes participants complying with best practice as set down by sports governing bodies, and ensuring they are not impaired by drink or drugs).

COMMUNICATION

FUNDAMENTALS

- **Recognise that statutory bodies and organisations with management responsibilities may have only limited powers to require or enforce.**

- **Avoid as far as possible the use of risk controls which discourage people from participating in the organisation or management of an activity.** Many activities rely on the active support of non-participants, often given voluntarily. Excessive or insensitively applied risk controls can discourage this support and even threaten the continuance of the activity).
- **Recognise that children's risk perception skills will not be fully developed.** (This must be taken into account in the design of facilities and activities, and by parents/guardians in the supervision of children).



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PARTNERSHIP

The principles in detail are as follows:

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- **Recognise that people taking part in similar activities will accept different levels of risk.** (Take this into account when planning facilities or activities. Higher levels of participant competence may offset the need for other types of risk control).
- **Recognise that risk control measures for one participant group may create risks to others.** (For example, fences erected to prevent people falling into water may impede rescues of people from the water).
- **Work with groups representative of participants to promote understanding and resolve conflict.**
- **Collect incident data in partnership with others wherever possible.** (This will increase greatly the value of the collected data).



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The principles in detail are as follows:

COMPETENCE

- Ensuring that participants are aware of and understand potential hazards and risks is the key element in ensuring that risks are undertaken voluntarily. (There are no nasty surprises awaiting participants).

COMMUNICATION

- Information and education of participants about the nature and extent of hazards, the risk control measures in place, and the precautions which the participants should take are crucial elements of risk control.

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- Wherever possible, integrate safety information with other information provided to the public. (These could include leaflets, interpretation boards, websites).

RESPONSIBILITY

PARTNERSHIP



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COMPETENCE

The principles in detail are as follows:

COMMUNICATION

- Recognise that some participants over-estimate their skills and abilities to a large degree. (For example young men and swimming).

FUNDAMENTALS

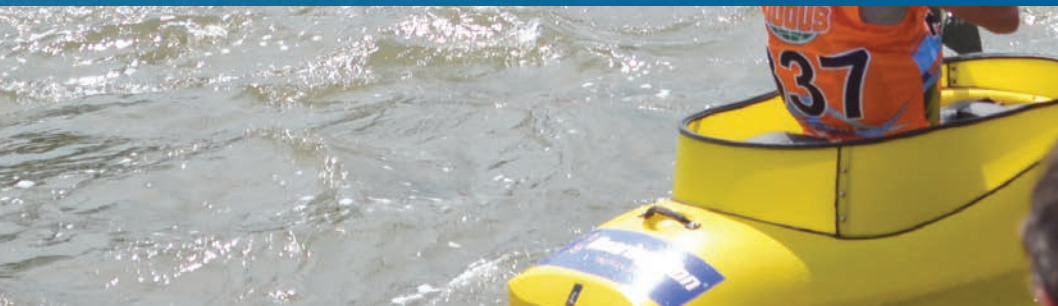
- Recognise that participants will have a range of abilities to recognise any given hazard. Some will over-estimate while others will under-estimate and sometimes fail to recognise a hazard exists.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Where competence levels are judged to be inadequate the NWSF will encourage training to improve competence.

PARTNERSHIP

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COMMUNICATION

The principles in detail are as follows:

FUNDAMENTALS

- Managing organisations, sports governing bodies and user representative groups need to effectively communicate the results of risk assessments and risk awareness material to the participants.

RESPONSIBILITY

- When communicating to actual or potential participants, take account of the language, literacy and cultural needs of the target audience.

PARTNERSHIP

AWARENESS

COMPETENCE

