

Open Water Safety Procedure

March 2021

Document summary and control

Name of procedure
Open Water Safety Procedure
Purpose of the procedure
To safeguard the health of employees and others by introducing formal measures to control associated risks of open water safety. Support managers in discharge of their responsibilities for completion of open water safety assessments.
Related documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Water Safety Policy • Open Water Safety Guidance • Open Water Safety Toolkit • Open Water Safety Frequently Asked Questions

Approval process	
Approved by	
Policy owner	Corporate Contracts and Assets
Approval date	TBC

Consultation and engagement			
Version	Date	Amended by	Comments
V1	November 2017		Draft submitted to Corporate Contracts and Assets
V2	Nov 2020		Draft signed off by cross-dep working group on OWS
V3	Mar 2021		Final draft for review by relevant officers

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Purpose	1
3. Scope	1
5. Responsibility.....	5
6. Further information.....	5

1. Introduction

This Open Water Safety procedure should be read in conjunction with the associated policy and toolkit.

The procedure defines the council's approach to the management of open water sites under council control. By implementing this procedure, the intention is to ensure the council's consistency of approach for management of all sites of open water.

As part of the council's approach to health and safety management, risk assessment procedures should be used by the respective responsible person for each site to determine suitable control measures that will be adopted. The aim of this procedure is to formally identify and demonstrate the rationale behind particular control measures and to set out an appropriate approach to risk assessment that is specific to open water sites.

The procedure refers to a number of hazards associated with open water sites but its main focus is on the potential for people to drown.

Within Wigan borough there are a number of open water sites under the ownership and management of Wigan Council, including some water-based activities that fall under the management of the council's leisure department. This procedure also includes areas of open water that, although not owned by the council, do border on council owned land. These need careful consideration, in particular where access is encouraged.

This procedure sets out measures available in reducing the risk of accidents at open water sites but does not give a definitive list of actions that will be taken. Each site will be assessed as part of a consistent risk management approach that will identify the appropriate and reasonable individual site requirements to reduce the risk of people drowning.

This water safety strategy has been developed with guidance from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) publication 'Safety in Inland Water Sites - Operational Guidelines' and the 'Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside' guide (www.vscg.co.uk).

2. Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to protect employees and non-employees alike; to ensure satisfactory measures for safety in which all can function, work and use safely the open water aspects of Wigan borough.

3. Scope

The scope of this procedure applies to all staff employed by Wigan Council. The procedure also extends to non-employees including public and partner organisations using or visiting land that include water features either owned or under the management of Wigan Council.

4. Risks specific to open water sites

Risk assessment

Within Wigan Council, the responsible person for land management must ensure that risk assessments are completed for each active open water site that is either owned or managed by the council. Arrangements must also be made by respective managers for assessment of council owned land that contains open water but is not directly managed by Wigan Council.

All site-specific water safety risk assessments must be complimented by other local arrangements and systems of work, for example, leisure and sports activity assessments and work activity risk assessments for employees.

Where employees, volunteers or contractors are required to work in or adjacent to open water, as well as the generic water safety risk assessment, a specific task-oriented assessment must be completed prior to work commencing.

Where council employees (including leisure staff formerly employed by the leisure trust) are responsible for the direct safety of open water activities or for working where a water safety hazard exists, suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training must be provided.

Mitigation and protective measures

Subject to risk assessment, personal rescue equipment (PRE), if required, should comprise of life rings and throw ropes. Life rings should be considered where areas have steep banks and deep water, for example, adjacent to locks, quay sides or rivers. Throw lines should be considered where the gradient is shallow and directional suitability is required.

The provision of PRE at events managed by the leisure department must be agreed subject to a site-specific risk assessment. Where equipment is deemed necessary, the responsible manager(s) for the site must have in place arrangements for regular inspection and monitoring.

Where appropriate, safety signage and lifesaving equipment should be combined into a position known as a 'personal rescue point'. The location of personal rescue points must be determined by the risk assessment process and should be visible from any point around the open water.

Personal rescue points might be exposed to vandalism, graffiti or theft of life saving aids and these issues must be considered when deciding whether or not to install PRE. Where PRE is prone to vandalism and the integrity of the equipment cannot be guaranteed, the responsible manager(s) must explore an alternative strategy to reduce associated risks, for example, increasing the physical level of edge protection.

Safety inspections and hazard identification

Managers that have responsibility for council owned or controlled open water must have arrangements in place to ensure that routine safety inspections are completed where the need is identified in the open water risk assessment. The frequency of the inspections will be specified and reasoned as part of the site-specific risk assessment and will take into account issues such as known swimming locations, signage, vandalism and local knowledge etc.

Inspection records must be completed by managers and any issues highlighted and recommendations implemented following each site inspection.

Environmental management

Environmental hazards can incorporate both natural and man-made pollutants. Natural pollutants, such as blooms of blue green algae, that form during periods of warm weather and man-made pollutants such as oil or similar products that are discharged into areas of open water present a range of hazards to visitors.

Where employees, visitors, wildlife or domestic animals are considered to be at risk as a result of natural or man-made pollution, the council will determine appropriate control measures in conjunction with key partner agencies.

Water quality is not expected to be routinely tested by the council. Testing will only be carried out in line with specific requirements for water activities or if specific hazards are identified during the risk assessment process.

Ice on open water

As part of individual site risk assessments, the formation of ice must be considered and an active management strategy put in place. On a waterbody where a significant risk is identified the council will undertake the following:

- Public awareness of the dangers of frozen ponds, lakes etc. will be raised through the council's news webpage and local press articles.
- Suitable and sufficient 'temporary' hazard warning signs must be displayed at access points with 'nag' signs positioned appropriately at all sites where necessary, as identified in site specific risk assessments.

When ice forms on open water it is the policy of the council not to break ice formations as this in itself is hazardous and presents a significant risk to employees. However, in extreme circumstances, consideration may need to be given to breaking ice over prolonged cold spells in the interests of environmental/wildlife safety.

Employees and contractors

All employees and contractors working at open water sites are required to ensure correct implementation of suitable controls in line with risk assessments of activities carried out adjacent to water.

On areas of open water, full time supervision is deemed to be neither reasonable nor practicable and is not the most effective response to controlling a water hazard. Where employees are present on site, they must adopt a proactive approach in educating the public and highlighting the common dangers around open water. Further information is available at: <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/>

First aid provision at open water sites

The responsible person for each open water site must complete a first aid risk assessment to ensure that suitable and sufficient first aid arrangements are in place when employees are on-site; outside those times, no first aid provision will be made at open water sites. All partner organisations of the council and contractors with a formal agreement to use water bodies at council sites must provide sufficient first aid equipment for their own employees.

Use of open water for activities

Register of users

The council's responsible person for land management will maintain a register of organisations or individuals that notify their intention to use any open waterbody for water-based activities, for example, sailing, wind surfing, swimming, fishing, etc.

Upon notification, the council responsible person for land management must provide all known relevant information, guidance and assessments relating to the respective waterbody so that appropriate arrangements can be made by users to manage associated risks safely.

The council will maintain a record of all information provided to respective users but is not in a position to monitor arrangements or recommendations for use of each and every waterbody throughout Wigan borough.

Where a group, organisation or individual wishes to use an area of water for an activity, the council should be notified so that exchange of information pertaining to each respective waterbody can be provided to the prospective users. The council will reserve the right to impose restrictions on use of any open waterbody under its own control at any time.

Notification will also apply when use of open water falls outside of the normal arrangements of a club or group using the water by lease, license or any other formal agreement, i.e. a club requiring use of the water for activities not specified by agreement. For example, a sailing club requiring use of the water for an organised swimming event.

The event organiser will be responsible for organising event activities in line with the site's normal operating procedures. Risk assessments should be available if requested in advance of each new event, including the provision of an emergency action plan and details of the supervision and rescue arrangements that might be needed. Although not enforceable, it is strongly recommended that organisations using council open water have an appropriate level of public liability insurance in place; the council's responsible person should advise users to this effect.

Recording and reporting of accidents

Where a member of the public or an employee is involved in a water-based accident or sustains an injury, the incident should be recorded in accordance with council procedures. Members of the public should be encouraged to report any incidents to the council so that where necessary, appropriate steps can be taken for investigation.

Open water sites not under Council Jurisdiction

Although the council holds the land management responsibilities for a number of sites within Wigan, there are also areas of open water within the borough not owned by the council. In such circumstances the council should encourage riparian landowners to adopt an open water safety policy wherever practical.

Monitoring

It will be the responsibility of respective site manager(s) of the council to implement and monitor all actions that have been identified within the site-specific water safety risk assessment.

Open water safety risk assessments must be reviewed on a regular basis and amended in line with significant change by the relevant manager.

5. Responsibility

Responsibility for correct implementation of this procedure and overarching policy is delegated to the managers and staff that have direct responsibilities for the management of council owned or controlled open waterbody and adjacent land.

6. Further information

This procedure has been produced in support of the following legislation and approved guidance:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations