



DART D'TALES PROVIDED NEWS OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS FROM THE RNLI LIFEBOAT TEAMS IN DARTMOUTH. SIMILAR NEWS ITEMS WILL NOW APPEAR REGULARLY IN BY THE DART MAGAZINE.

COASTAL DEATHS: RNLI SAYS 'FIGHT YOUR INSTINCTS, NOT THE WATER' TO HELP STAY ALIVE

The RNLI Dart inshore lifeboat has had an unusually busy start to their year and has already been called out 14 times. They were called out three times on both Saturday 1 April and Wednesday 4 May. There have been two requests to assist in the evacuation of casualties by water; one when a Dartmothian fell 15 feet and injured his back on Castle Cove and a second was from the cruise ship *Serenissima* which was moored in Dartmouth Harbour. An elderly gentleman had fallen and fractured his hip. All the lifeboat crew, except the three who have very recently joined the team, are highly trained in First Aid and on both occasions Haydn Glanvill, the paramedic on our crew, attended the shout.



RNLI on call out to a Dartmothian who fell 15 feet and injured his back on Castle Cove



Whenever the lifeboat is on the water the radio is always open on the emergency channel, Ch.16, so they were able to respond instantly to a Mayday call on Saturday 20 May, even though they were involved in a fundraising event in the Dartmouth Boatfloat. The call had been put out by the crew of the Dart Sailability vessel, *Farries Flyer*, who were on the river at Dittisham and had heard cries for help. The lifeboat was on scene in eight minutes but the lone yachtsman who had fallen in the water transferring from his yacht to his tender had been found clinging to the stern of his vessel and been recovered safely by the Dart Sailability crew.

The aim of the RNLI has always been to "Save lives at sea" and coastal fatality figures released by the RNLI show 33 people lost their lives around the south west coast in 2016, with nearly a quarter (24%) of those being people who didn't even intend to enter the water. Swimming, jumping in and general leisure use of the water accounted for 42% of the deaths, walking and running 18% and sailing and boating (powered and manual) accounted for a further 9%. In 9% of cases the activity was unknown.

As the RNLI's national drowning prevention campaign **Respect the Water** enters its fourth year the organisation is highlighting the danger of Cold Water Shock. Short of being hit by a bus or struck by lightning

sudden immersion in cold water is the most shocking thing that can happen to your body. It triggers the instinctive but life-threatening reaction to gasp uncontrollably and swim hard, which can quickly lead to drowning.

The immediate threat is from the loss of breathing control. The person gasps, even though they are underwater and has difficulty holding their breath. Once on the surface they breathe rapidly and uncontrollably. The body then automatically increases the heart rate and blood pressure. Finally there is the loss of mental control. The casualty, for that is what they are now, becomes disorientated, can't think clearly and panics. They become unable to carry out a plan of action to save themselves.

Cold water survival expert Professor Mike Tipton explains:

'We often rely on our instincts but our instinctive response to sudden immersion in cold water – gasping, thrashing and swimming hard – is potentially a killer. It increases the chances of water entering your lungs, increases the strain on your heart, cools the skin further and helps air escape from any clothing, which then reduces buoyancy.'

'Although it's counter-intuitive, the best immediate course of action in that situation is to fight your instinct and try to float or rest, just for a short time. The effects of cold water shock will pass quite quickly, within 60–90 seconds. Floating for this short time will let you regain control of your breathing and your survival chances will

greatly increase.

'Floating is not an easy skill in cold open water but most people can float and the air trapped in their clothes as they fall in should make it easier. As little exercise as necessary can be undertaken to help stay afloat. The recommended floating position is to lean back in the water, preferably with your back to any waves, and keep your airway clear. Keeping calm will help maintain buoyancy. Some people find it helpful to gently scull with their hands and kick their feet to keep afloat. The main principle is to do as little as possible until you have control of your breathing. At this point you have a much better chance of avoiding drowning and surviving until you can swim to safety, call for help, or continuing to float until help arrives.'

If boating always wear a lifejacket, even for the simplest tasks. For those who are planning to go into the water, the best way to stay safe is to choose a life-guarded beach and swim between the red and yellow flags, which is the area most closely monitored by the lifeguards. If you see someone else in danger in the water, fight your instinct to go in and try to rescue them yourself – instead call 999 and ask for the Coastguard.

The campaign is targeted at adult men, who account for over three-quarters (76%) of the coastal deaths in the south west over the past five years, although the advice is relevant to anyone who goes near the water. The Respect the Water campaign will run throughout the summer on channels including cinema, outdoor,



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radio, online and on catch-up TV channels. The RNLI is asking people to visit **RNLI.org/RespectTheWater** where they will find information on the effects of cold water shock and floating techniques. On social media, search **#RespectTheWater**.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The **BRITANNIA RN VOLUNTEER BAND** will be giving a concert at St Saviours Church on Saturday 15 July at 7.30pm. Tickets at £10 are available from the RNLI Visitor Centre (01803 832423).

The **RNLI DART FETE** takes place on 27th July (10am - 4pm) in Dartmouth's Royal Avenue Gardens. Musical entertainment and the very successful stalls as usual. Donated bottles for the bottle stall can be left at the RNLI Visitor Centre on the South Embankment. If you can help at this event or on the Flag Day (4th August) please contact Tracey Lucas at the Visitor Centre 01803 832423 or leave a message on the Contact us page on the RNLI Dart web site www.dartlifeboat.org.uk.

News, details of launches, photographs and videos can be found on the Dart station website.

www.dartlifeboat.org.uk or the station Facebook page www.facebook.com/dartrnlilifeboat

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