

## Water Safety Advice



The Tayside area encapsulates a wide variety of inland waterways which attracts an increasing amount of people keen to participate in recreational water activities. These activities include fishing, swimming, canoeing and gorge walking, to name but a few. While people should be encouraged to enjoy the countryside and its amenities, it is important that they have an awareness of the potential hazards and safety procedures to follow to prevent accidents occurring.

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children aged 14 and under, with children under age 5 at the highest risk. Many drowning's and near drowning's occur when children are left unattended by a pool, pond or in the bath. The majority of all drowning's and near drowning's occur between May and August.

It's also a fact that alcohol plays a large part in the drowning of adults, and the consumption of alcohol should be avoided at all costs if anyone has an intention to participate in water related activities.

Even during the warmer summer months in the UK inland waters remain cold, seldom rising above 10 – 15 degrees. However as the air temperature rises people are increasingly likely to be tempted to cool off by taking a swim or paddle in one of the many burns, lochs and rivers within the Tayside area. Whilst such waters may look calm and safe there are many hidden dangers. As a result of sudden

immersion in cold water, hidden currents and submerged hazards like refuse and vegetation, many people will get into difficulties and be unable to save themselves, under water currents can be very strong, and even paddlers can be pulled over.

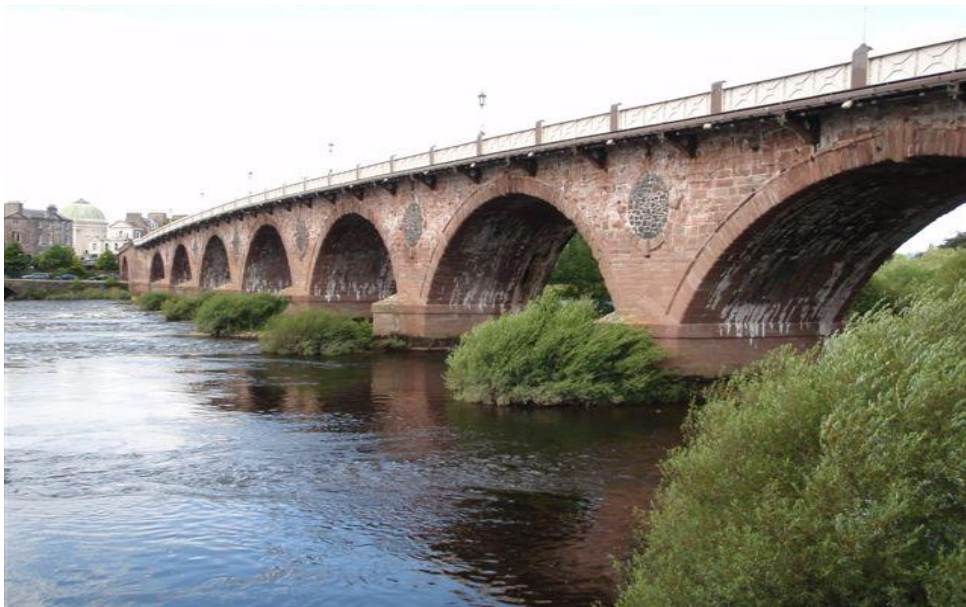
Research has shown that many will be able to swim, the majority of them will be male and alcohol and/or peer pressure may feature in their decision to plunge in.

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## **Water safety for Ponds, Lochs and Rivers**

The majority of drowning's among older children occur in open bodies of water. These drowning's often happen when an older child overestimates his or her swimming ability or when he or she is swimming in an unsupervised area. To prevent drowning's in natural or open bodies of water:

- Always watch your child while at the beach, loch or other natural bodies of water.
- Never let older children swim in unsupervised areas like quarries, canals or ponds. Many times children underestimate the depth of water.
- Make sure your child wears a personal flotation device when in or near natural bodies of water. Air filled 'swimming aids,' such as 'water wings,' are not considered safety devices and are not substitutes



## **Water sports**

Generally persons using lochs and rivers for boating and sporting activities will not intentionally be planning to go in the water, but this is always a possibility. The same hazards exist in terms of sudden immersion in cold water, hidden currents and submerged items. It is therefore essential that anyone on or near the water wears a buoyancy aid, takes some basic training in personal survival and knows what to do in an emergency situation. Parental supervision of children on or near the water is essential.

By following these simple safety precautions, tragic drowning's and near-drowning's can be avoided.

- Get appropriate training to include survival and safety training. Use the correct safety equipment; this may include a life-jacket. Consider joining a club for support and advice.
- Check the equipment that you are using to ensure that it is in good condition.
- Plan your activity. Always ensure that someone is aware of your plans, particularly the time that you expect to return.
- Check weather forecast and conditions before setting out and be prepared to change your plans if these are adverse.
- Take a means of communication with you such as a mobile phone, or if appropriate, flares or a whistle.

It is a fact that people who get into difficulties whilst pursuing sporting activities have usually failed to take adequate safety precautions in light of the prevailing conditions and have overestimated their ability.

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## **Pets and the Water**

Many of the same dangers apply to pets in warm weather, and you should always be careful when encouraging pets to enter water courses.

- Blue Green Algae can be toxic for pets if they swallow water, so please be vigilant when near lochs and still water areas during the summer.
- Lochs are home to nesting birds, particularly around the waters edges, and dogs can disturb nesting broods or young.

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## Hazards

- There is little indication as to how deep the water maybe and although it could be shallow at the edges, in places shelves can lead to much deeper water being very close to the water's edge.
- From the side, you cannot tell what is on the bed of the loch or river, sharp stones or objects can cause injuries to those that venture into the water.
- The weather may be warm but the water is still very cold, and it is possible to suffer thermal shock if your body temperature changes rapidly, and this can make it hard to breath and control yourself - even the strongest of swimmers can find swimming extremely difficult in these circumstances. Ensure you are adequately dressed for the conditions e.g. wetsuit or drysuit.
- Many of our watercourses are controlled by dams upstream, and in these cases a small burn can rapidly become fast flowing if the dam releases water.
- Blue green algal blooms can affect many lochs and areas of still water during the summer, and this can be harmful to both humans and animals.



- Additional hazards presented during winter months include ice covered water. This can be extremely dangerous as the thickness of ice and its load bearing capacity is not known. Venturing onto ice can result in persons falling through and becoming trapped.

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## What should you do if you see someone in trouble in the water?

**Do not** go in after them

If there is an adult nearby tell them at once

If there is a **float** or **life buoy**, throw it to the person in the water

If a **throwline** is available, use it to reach the person in the water

**Use the nearest telephone and ring 999.** Ask for the Fire and Rescue, Police or the coastguard if you are at the beach

Take care with frozen ponds, rivers and lakes they are extremely dangerous



### Advice

The best advice is not to go into the water. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code contains advice as to your access rights to water. If you get into difficulties or see someone in trouble, please contact the emergency services.