Water safety risk assessment

Assessment details and process

Site / water body name: _____

Community or campaign group: _____

Grid reference / What3Words: _____

Assessment carried out by: _____

Date of assessment: _____

Date of next review: _____

HSE standard 5-step process:

- Step 1: Identify the hazards
- Step 2: Assess the risks
- Step 3: Control the risks
- Step 4: Record your findings
- Step 5: Review the controls

A detailed hazard-by-hazard risk assessment table is provided in Appendix A.

Area assessed

Describe the physical area covered by the assessment — what was walked/inspected, on which bank(s), and over what distance. Include a site map or photo if possible.

Description of area assessed (extent, banks covered, access points, distance)

Ground/bed conditions (e.g. shelving profile, substrate, depth changes)

Known flooding behaviour

Map or photos of site:

Hazard analysis

Risk factors

Local risk factors specific to this site (e.g. known incidents, demographics of visitors, seasonal patterns)

Who may be harmed?

List the groups who use or could be exposed to the site.

- ☐ Swimmers / bathers
- ☐ Children
- ☐ Dog walkers
- ☐ Fishermen / anglers
- ☐ Boaters / paddlers / kayakers
- ☐ Other: _____

How may they be harmed?

Describe the water body's specific hazards, then list plausible accident scenarios. Delete/replace examples below as relevant.

Physical hazards (e.g. variable depth/flow/temperature, water level changes, submerged objects, water quality after rainfall)

Example accident scenarios to consider (edit for your site):

- People entering the water to paddle or bathe and getting into difficulty (e.g. out of depth, losing footing)

- Boisterous behaviour, possibly involving alcohol or drugs
- Jumping from a bridge, rock or platform and hitting the bottom
- An unsupervised child entering the water and getting into difficulty
- A person entering the water to rescue another person or an animal and getting into difficulty themselves
- A person losing footing or suffering a medical episode and falling into the water
- Injury from a submerged or bankside object

Existing control measures

What is already in place at the site — signage, rescue equipment, supervision, bridge/edge protection, nearest AED, etc?

Existing signage

Existing rescue equipment

Existing physical protection (e.g. bridge netting, fencing)

Nearest Automated External Defibrillator (AED) — location and distance

Recommendations

Work through each area below and record what's needed for your site. The bullet prompts are common considerations from RLSS UK guidance — keep, adapt or remove as works for you.

Signage

- Position signage so it is seen before anyone enters the water — typically at main access points and/or the water's edge
- Consider a separate warning sign at any known danger point (e.g. a jumping spot)
- Use clear, legible text plus pictograms; comply with the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996

Suggested key messages to include (edit as relevant):

- Whether the area is lifeguarded (state clearly if it is not)
- Young children should be supervised at all times
- Do not swim alone
- Do not enter the water when it is in flood or fast-flowing
- Avoid entering during/after heavy rainfall (water quality and flow risk)
- Do not swim under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or after eating
- Location of the nearest AED
- What to do in an emergency (contact number, What3Words/grid reference)

Signage plan for this site (locations, content, who will install/maintain

Public Rescue Equipment (PRE)

- Consider likelihood of theft/vandalism when choosing equipment and housing
- Plan for ongoing checks and maintenance
- Site equipment above known flood levels

A throw line is often the most practical and cost-effective option. Lockable/coded housing linked to the emergency services can reduce vandalism risk but is more expensive and slower to access.

PRE plan for this site (equipment type, location, housing, maintenance owner)

Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

AED plan (existing distance, case for a closer unit, proposed location)

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community Engagement

- A Facebook or community group page can share when swimming is not advisable (river level, water quality), help people find swim buddies, surface safety concerns, and organise events such as litter-picks
- Local water safety organisations (e.g. RLSS UK, RNLI) may provide safety awareness resources or training, including for schools

Community engagement plan for this site

Emergency Services Coordination

- Engage emergency services on the project, signage, PRE placement, and emergency procedures
- Arrange a site visit to confirm the emergency access route, especially if the site is hard to reach

Emergency services engagement — contact, status, access route notes

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Physical Hazard Protection

E.g. bridge netting, fencing, restricting access to a known danger point.

Physical protection measures needed

Matrix Risk Assessment

Hazard	Risk	Population at risk	Risk Rating			Control measures	Action taken		Residual Risk Rating
			Likelihood of injury	Severity of injury	Risk		By	Date	