



# Riverside Community Water Safety

*Brought to you by the Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum (TTWSF)*



*Working together for a #SaferThames*

  
**#RESPECTTHEWATER**

## Welcome

Living, working or enjoying the view – more and more people are drawn to the tidal River Thames and its banks every year. Are you new to the waterside or visiting the river for the first time? Or a resident of many years and a seasoned river user? Whoever you are, we urge you to read this guidance on how to ***enjoy the river safely and #RespectTheWater.***

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### Introduction:

The tidal River Thames is beautiful, awe-inspiring and ever changing, at different times of the day and throughout the year. We want you to enjoy this extraordinary blue space – but also to be aware of the dangers.

Sadly, about 30 people lose their lives in the tidal Thames every year. Many more are rescued, but suffer life-changing injuries.

The Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum (TTWSF) has been set up to help save lives from drowning. A key part of our work is to improve awareness within the community and make it as simple as possible to keep safe in or by the water. Please take time to read the information that follows and help us to keep the tidal river safe.



***The river may look inviting, but the water is cold, even in a heatwave***



***The river may look gentle, but the strong tide can sweep you a mile away in just a few minutes***



## The tidal River Thames

The Thames is tidal from the estuary as far as Teddington Lock in west London – that's more than 90 miles in distance. The height of the water can change by up to seven metres, and it changes twice a day. The current is so strong that it would beat an Olympic swimmer.

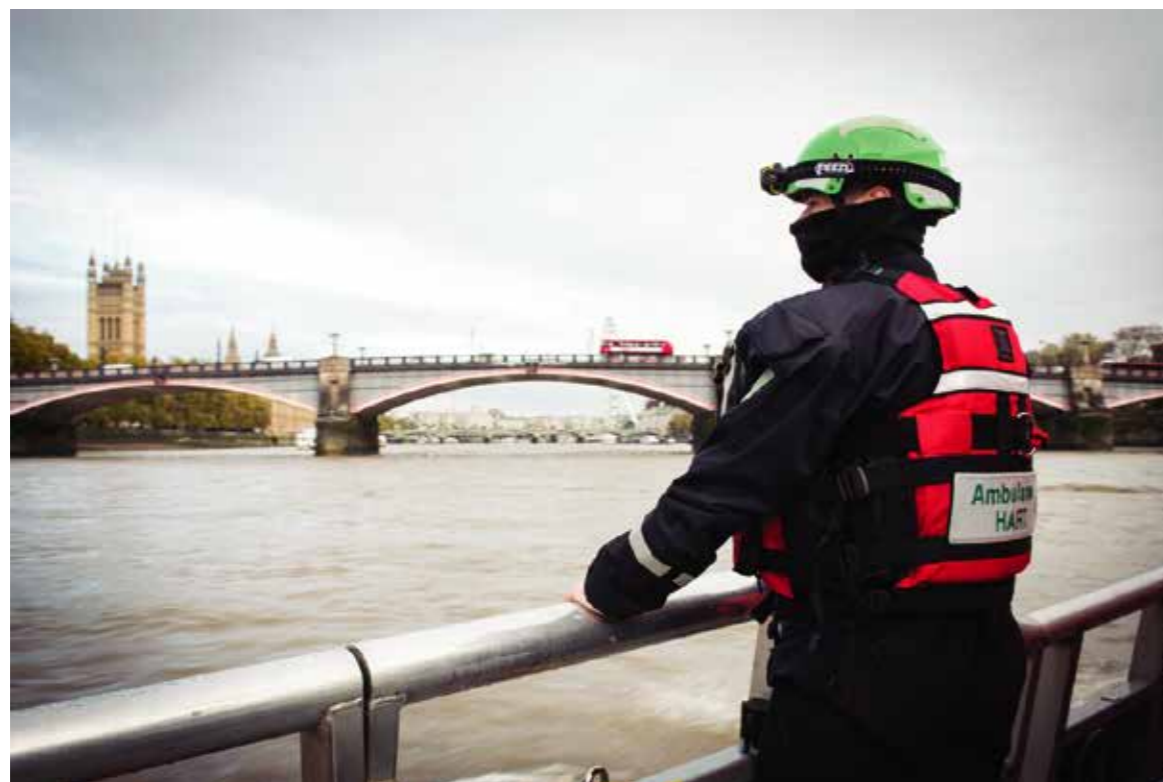
Areas of the foreshore (the edges of the river) which are visible at low tide will be under several metres of water at high tide. There have been incidents where people have gone on to the foreshore and then been cut off by the tide – they have had to call the emergency services to rescue them.

The river is thriving – the Port of London is the UK's biggest commercial port and also the country's busiest inland waterway. Freight is handled as far west at Hammersmith and Wandsworth and the demand for water transport is growing every year, as a green and efficient alternative to moving goods on congested roads.

The tidal River Thames is also a vital transport artery for passengers and attracts an estimated 19,000 recreational users every year. More information can be found on the Port of London Authority's website: [www.pla.co.uk](http://www.pla.co.uk)

In very broad terms, the river can be divided into three:

- Lower (estuary to the tidal Thames Barrier) has the highest commercial cargo traffic.
- Middle (Thames Barrier to Putney) is mostly passenger services and river tours.
- Upper (Putney to Teddington Lock) has the highest use for recreation – canoeing, rowing and stand-up paddleboarding, for example.



## Safety advice

If you live or work close to the river, there are some simple practical steps you can take to help everyone enjoy the river safely.

### 1. Prepare

- Make a note of where your nearest life-saving equipment is located and familiarise yourself with how to use it. The [RNLI](http://www.rnli.org.uk) can advise you on local throwline training, lifejacket clinics and other safety events and services.
- Make a note of any signage that has been installed along the riverside and make sure you know what they mean.



Lifejackets  
must be worn



Beware –  
deep Water

See more signs at  
[www.rosipa.com/leisure-safety/water/advice/signs](http://www.rosipa.com/leisure-safety/water/advice/signs)

- Download the *What3Words* app on your mobile device. If there is an emergency, such as someone being in the water, you can use the app to provide a highly accurate location to the emergency services (on land and on the water).  
<https://www.what3words.com>
- Familiarise yourself with what to do in an emergency (see 'In an emergency' overleaf).
- Make a note of the location of your nearest defibrillator and learn how to use it – take a look at this St John Ambulance tutorial on how to use a defibrillator.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFvL7wTFzI0>
- Swimming is not not allowed in the majority of the tidal Thames. The river's powerful tides run at around five miles an hour and there are dangerous eddies and undertows. The river is a busy superhighway for various types of vessels. There are only certain locations where swimming is even allowed. For more information, visit <https://www.pla.co.uk/Safety/Swimming-in-the-Tidal-Thames>
- If you do want to enjoy sport on the river, make sure that you do so under the guidance of a qualified coach. <https://www.boatingonthethames.co.uk/> provides lots of information about safe enjoyment of the river and gives information on the locations of local sports clubs and activity providers.
- The foreshore is home to hundreds of years of history, and ancient artefacts and structures can be seen at low tide. Exploring the foreshore is allowed, provided you have a permit to do so.





- See more information on Thames foreshore permits at <https://www.pla.co.uk/Environment/Thames-foreshore-permits> and follow the safety advice. The PLA app provides tide times to help you plan your activity safely.

## 2. Report

In recent years, the TTWSF has been working to make sure that standardised information is provided on lifebuoys, to avoid confusion. You can read the latest guidance online. <http://www.pla.co.uk/Safety/Water-Safety/Water-Safety>

If you notice that any lifesaving equipment is missing or damaged – for example, if a lifebuoy is not on its housing or the line has been damaged – please report this to the equipment owner, the contact details for which should be on the lifebuoy housing, or contact the RNLI.

## 3. In an emergency

If you see someone in trouble (or if you think they're in trouble) in the water or on the foreshore:

**✂ Throw them a lifering or throwline ✂ Call 999 and ask for the coastguard**

- Give the location:
  - This should be noted on the lifebuoy housing; or
  - Use the [What3Words](#) app; or
  - Look out for landmarks (road name, pier, well-known building) and **make sure you say which side of the river you are on and the person is closest to.**

## Don't delay making the call

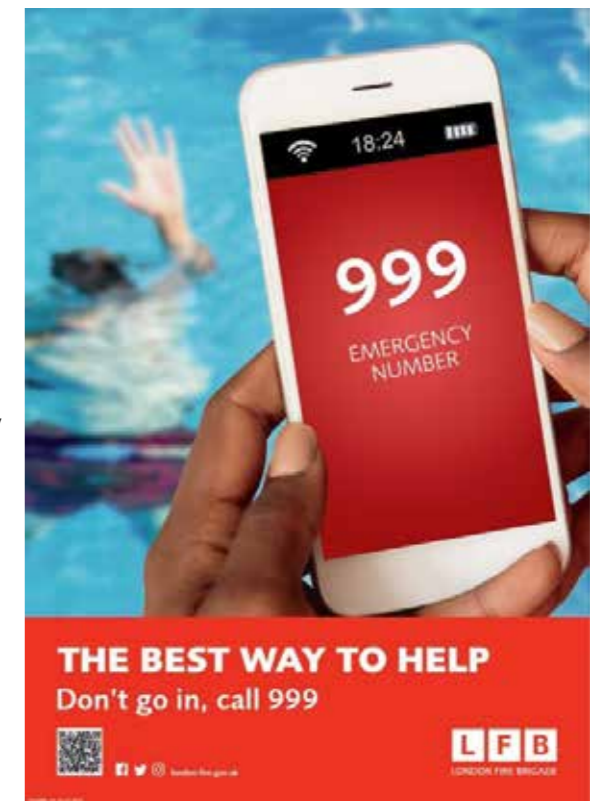
While on the call to the emergency services, you can help the rescue operation further if you're able to:

- Give the names of any crewed vessels in the area, as they may be able to get to the casualty faster;
- Establish where a rescue boat could get the casualty to land, e.g. a pier/pontoon name;
- Establish where a land-based emergency vehicle could reach the casualty, e.g. a private car park, with water access or slipway.

## Don't go in!

Whatever you do, do not enter the water yourself. It is tempting to jump in after a person or animal, but you could well get into difficulties yourself and end up being another casualty. You can help much better by:

- Using any nearby lifesaving equipment;
- Keeping an eye on the location of the casualty (remember that the river can very quickly take them away from where they entered the water);
- Assisting the emergency services to locate the casualty as quickly as possible.
- Alcohol lowers inhibitions and can lead to risk-taking behaviour. Too many members of the public have entered the water after drinking alcohol. Some were rescued – some were not so lucky. Stay safe and do not be tempted to enter the river, even if you are a strong swimmer.



## Someone in crisis

If you see someone who seems like they may be in crisis close to the river's edge, **Dial 999 and ask for the coastguard and the police.** They are highly experienced in helping people in crisis and will be able to advise you on what to do.

## Watersports

There are many ways to enjoy the tidal River Thames, with lots of sporting activities now taking place on the water each year. These are just some of them:

- Rowing
- Stand-up paddleboarding
- Jet skiing (strict limitations on locations)
- Kayaking
- Motorboating
- Sailing

## More water safety information

Visit <https://www.boatingonthethames.co.uk/> for more information and safety advice. Or find your local club for more details and to learn how to enjoy your chosen sport safely.

More water safety information is available via the following links:

- <https://www.pla.co.uk/WaterSafety>
- <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/water-safety/>
- <https://rnli.org/safety>
- <https://www.rlss.org.uk/Pages/Category/water-safety-information>
- <https://www.rosipa.com/leisure-safety/water>
- <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/safety-on-our-waterways>
- <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety/water-safety-toolkit>
- <https://www.thamesacademy.london/training/training-courses/riverside-personal-safety/>

**Remember, safety first! Always prepare fully for watersports on the Thames.**

## Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum

**The TTWSF involves the full range of regulators, emergency services and voluntary groups involved in managing safety on the tidal Thames:**



**Port of London Authority:** The statutory harbour authority for the tidal Thames; a public trust, established to administer, preserve and improve the Port of London.

**Royal National Lifeboat Institution:** A charity that saves lives at sea, whose operation extends to the tidal reaches of the Thames, with stations providing cover as far upriver as Teddington.



**Metropolitan Police Service:** A 24/7 frontline marine policing response unit, based on the river at Wapping.

**London Fire Brigade:** Has a waterborne response capability, as well as an extensive community outreach programme, part of which focuses on water safety.



**HM Coastguard:** Her Majesty's Coastguard is the part of the MCA responsible for national maritime search and rescue; on the Thames this is coordinated by London Coastguard.

**London Ambulance Service:** The NHS trust covering an area of 620 square miles. Its Hazardous Area Response Teams (HART) provide paramedic care in environments beyond the capability of standard units.

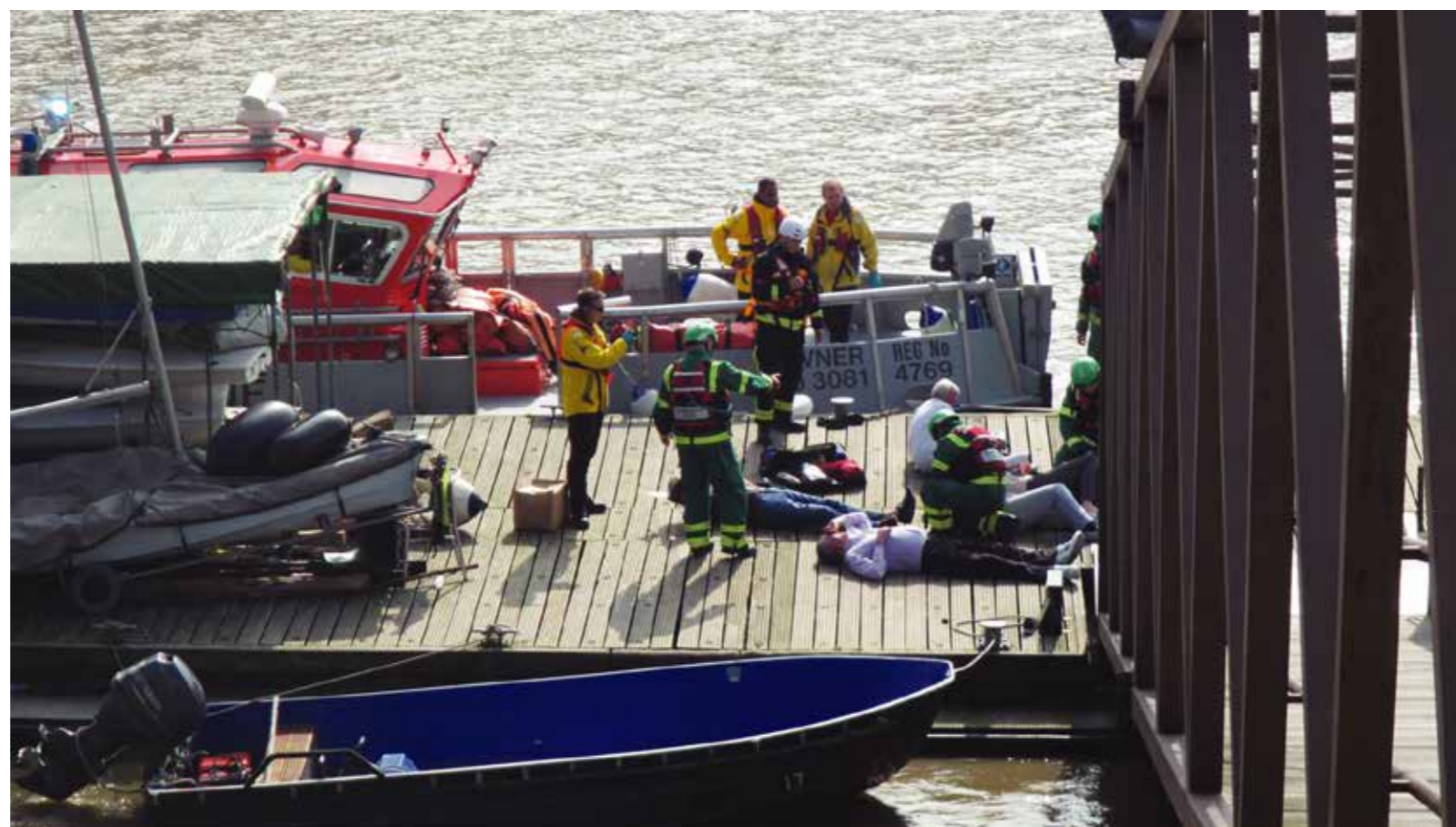


**City of London Corporation:** The governing body of the Square Mile, which also acts as the Port Health Authority for the tidal Thames.

**London River Services:** LRS is a division of Transport for London. It is responsible for the safety of all users of TfL-owned passenger piers, and for licensing charter and scheduled services operators within the TfL managed network.



**The City of London Police:** Responsible for policing the Square Mile, which includes Tower Bridge, London Bridge, Blackfriars Bridge, Millennium Bridge and Southwark Bridge.



*Emergency services practice simulation exercise*

**This document and other water safety information can be  
downloaded from [www.pla.co.uk/watersafety](http://www.pla.co.uk/watersafety)  
#SaferThames #RespectTheWater**