



Water Safety..... Information

Ice Safety

December 2005

Background

In the last 10 years over twenty people have drowned after falling through ice into water, while many others have had to be rescued and revived. Looking at past incidents it appears that the individuals most at risk are young children and males of any age. Children are obviously attracted to frozen lakes and canals as they present natural ice skating opportunities

However, over 50 per cent of ice related drowning involved an attempted rescue of another person or a dog. In many instances the dog managed to scramble ashore unaided while the owner did not. It is therefore prudent not to throw sticks or balls for dogs near frozen water and if they do get into trouble, not to attempt to rescue them by venturing onto the ice!

Avoiding Tragedies - advice for site operators and managers

What can those responsible for bodies of water susceptible to freezing do to avoid such tragedies occurring on their waters during the winter? It is important that operators have fully developed strategies for winter water safety and that staff have and understand the normal operating procedures and emergency action plans. Operators need to know where the public go onto the ice and when these bodies of water freeze over and in their risk assessments give consideration to the following control measures and ideas:

- **Publicity and education** – raise awareness of the dangers of frozen water bodies. Use the local media to launch an education campaign on the dangers of frozen water. If resources allow, circulate leaflets or fliers to residents in areas close to water bodies. (These may be included in local papers to save on distribution costs.) Carry out education initiatives in local schools.
- **Information** – Provide users with information at the site of the hazard: what to do in an emergency where they are, who to call etc. Where appropriate Position 'Beware- Thin Ice' signs to British Standard colour and format at the site itself. Specific Ice warning signs now form part of the BSI Water Safety Signage Standard - BS5499: 2002 Part 11 Water Safety Signs.
- **Location** of the signage should be determined as a result of the risk assessment and located at such places as: the main access points, areas where people gather around the water body and where access to the ice is particularly easy or commonplace. Places such wildfowl feeding areas are particularly important in parks for example.
- **Ice Signs should be temporary**, being erected when ice is present and removed when it thaws, otherwise they will become ineffective and may even be counter-productive. Birmingham City Council have reversible signs on their life ring housings that usually warn of swimming dangers but can turned around to warn of ice in freezing conditions.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

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- **Supervision** - increase levels of supervision such as park rangers during cold periods. This could be difficult during holiday periods where staffing levels are lower, but people if the weather is dry and cold are more likely to visit such sites looking for opportunities for exercise during the Christmas holidays or the spring half term in February. If you re-deploy additional staff ensure they are trained and equipped to carry out the tasks required of them.
- **Develop an EAP** so that staff know what they should do when responding to an incident. When staff are patrolling ensure: in sites where public rescue equipment is located that it checked, are able to provide assistance in the case of an emergency e.g. access to first aid, attempt to dissuade the public from going onto the ice, have adequate PPE, throw lines, if trained to use, and a means of communication to summon the emergency services.
- **Rescue and Emergency Services** – Liase with the relevant local rescue and emergency services to ensure that they are familiar with the body of water you manage and make arrangements for their access to the site 24/7

Ice Breaking

This is an activity carried out by some authorities where the edge of the ice is broken to try to deter people from walking on it and therefore getting further out into danger, before taking this course of action, consideration should be given to following information:

- Develop a policy on whether to break ice around the edges of water bodies.
- This decision should be based upon a risk assessment, which will be site specific.
- The assessment criteria should include the depth of water around the edges, the ease in which people can get out, the likelihood of it refreezing, the degree of risk to those staff who carry out the activity
- The assessment should be done with consultation from rescue services.

RoSPA would not recommend the practice of ice breaking without a prior risk assessment and in only a few circumstances feel it would provide a significant improvement in safety. Additional consideration should be given to the following factors:

- Site managers need to be aware that in carrying out ice breaking, employees are likely to be put at increased risk of falling through the ice
- If snow falls after ice has been broken, children may cross the trench unaware that the ice has been made less stable
- A determined 'ice skater' will inevitably find a way across the broken perimeter and will then be at greater risk of falling through the ice due to the increased instability of the ice layer
- Weaker thin ice may make it more difficult for an effective rescue to be carried out.



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Incident Response

Although the message should be getting through to people that the only way to stay safe near frozen water is to KEEP OFF, every year individuals repeatedly dice with death and venture out onto frozen lakes, canals and other areas of inland water. The inevitable result is that some fall through or become stranded on islands unable to return to safety. So what action should be taken in these circumstances to assist the casualty without putting the rescuer at risk?

- Call for assistance from the emergency services.
- Do not attempt to go out onto the ice yourself.
- Instruct the casualty to keep still to maintain heat and energy.
- Try to find something that will extend your reach, such as a rope, pole, branch or item of clothing.
- Throw this or reach out to the casualty with it. Then, making sure you are stable on the bank, by lying down or getting someone to hold onto you, attempt to pull the person to the shore.
- It is advisable for staff who are working at such sites to carry with them (or in their vehicle) a throw line for this purpose.
- If you cannot find something with which to perform a reach or throw rescue, try to find something that will float to throw or push out to them. This will help to keep the casualty afloat until assistance arrives.
- Through your rescue KEEP OFF THE ICE, continue to reassure the casualty and keep them talking until help arrives.
- If the rescue is successful the casualty will need to be kept warm and treated for shock. All casualties should be taken to hospital even if they appear to be unaffected by their ordeal.

Further information and Resources:

RoSPA have produced a simple easy to read leaflet for parents and teachers which shows how the 'Be Water Wise' code applies in winter and highlights the dangers presented by water and ice. These can be ordered in packs of 10. More online water safety information for children and young people can be found on RoSPA's water safety pages.

Site managers can find out more information about the BSI Water Safety Signage Standard - BS5499: 2002 Part 11 Water Safety Signs .The RoSPA publication: Safety at Inland Water Sites provides operators with a framework for risk assessment of inland water sites, and offers guidelines and principles for year round water site management. Information about these resources can be accessed online.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents is a registered charity, which was established over 80 years ago. **RoSPA's mission is to enhance the quality of life by exercising a powerful influence for accident prevention.** More information can be found on www.rospa.com or by email at help@rospa.com

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