

CARDIFF COUNCIL

CODE OF GUIDANCE

WORKING ON OR NEAR WATER

Purpose

This Code of Guidance provides information in respect of health and safety during work activities on or near inland and inshore waters. It covers the principal legal requirements, the hazards likely to be met, and the precautions that need to be taken to ensure good standards of health and safety. The guidance is set out as follows:

- 1.0 General
- 2.0 Legal Requirements
- 3.0 Hazards
- 4.0 Precautionary Measures

1.0 General

All work activities will present a range of health and safety issues that need to be properly managed. The basic principles involve the identification of hazards, assessment of risks, designing safe systems of work, ensuring the workforce are properly trained, equipped and supervised, and having appropriate procedures in place. When work has to be carried out on or in the vicinity of water several additional hazards are introduced that must be carefully evaluated and controlled.

2.0 Legal Requirements

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 applies to all workplaces and work activities. This sets out the general duties of employers towards their employees and members of the public, and the duties employees have to themselves and to each other. Although work on or near water is not mentioned specifically, employers are required to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health safety and welfare at work of their employees, and any other persons who might be affected; provide a safe working environment; health and safety training, instruction and supervision; and any necessary protective clothing and equipment.

Employees are required to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected; co-operate with their employer in matters of health and safety; report dangerous situations; and make proper use of the safety equipment provided.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to carry out suitable and sufficient assessments of risk to employees and others who might be affected by work activities, and to put in place appropriate risk control measures. Consequently all aspects of the work will need to be considered during the risk assessment process, including the hazards presented by working on or near water.

The Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996 require employers engaged in construction work to take reasonably practical measures to prevent persons falling into water; to minimise the risk of drowning in the event of a fall into water; and to provide suitable rescue equipment and training in the use of it. Also, the transportation by water to or from work sites must be done safely; and any vessels used should be suitable, properly maintained, under the control of a competent person and not overcrowded or overloaded.

In addition to the above, the Merchant Shipping Acts, and related Regulations and Codes of Practice would apply to passenger carrying crafts, workboats, pontoons, lifebuoys etc. Merchant Shipping Legislation is administered by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

3.0 Hazards

Any workplace over, on or near water presents a danger that persons might slip or fall into the water, be swept off their feet by wave action, tide action, strong currents or swell from passing water traffic. Adverse weather is also a factor that can increase the danger, and work conditions can change quickly. Whether or not a person is injured by falling in the water, there is an immediate risk of drowning and/or being carried away by water currents.

Sound precautions must be taken, firstly to prevent persons entering the water and, secondly, if the worst happens, to ensure that they will float and are rescued in the shortest possible time. It is essential, when working on or near water that safe systems of work are in place based on a thorough risk assessment and that staff are properly trained and instructed.

When working on or near water consideration must also be given to the health implications of falls into the water. The water may possibly be polluted, for example when working near sewage discharge points, and there is the ever-present risk of contracting leptospirosis (or Weil's disease) from water contaminated by rat urine. Further guidance in respect of leptospirosis and the inoculations recommended for employees likely to have contact with water can be found in the [Cardiff Harbour Authority's Health and Safety Manual](#).

4.0 Causes of Entry into water

These include:

- Falls from height
- Trips, slips, stumbles from low level
- Persons being knocked over by moving objects (e.g. crane loads, vehicles, etc.)
- Loss of balance (e.g. by high winds, sudden boat movements, etc.)
- Failure or absence of edge barriers
- Failure or absence of fall prevention equipment, ropes, lines.
- Floating platforms or vessels sinking.
- Tide action, waves or swell from passing waterborne traffic.

5.0 Hazards of Falling into Water

The most immediate danger is of drowning. Factors that can contribute to this are:

- Shock from sudden immersion in cold water
- Weight of waterlogged clothing
- Life jacket not being worn
- Incapacity following injury – caused by striking an object during a fall, or whilst in the water.
- Fatigue or hypothermia where rescue is not immediate.

6.0 Precautions

Platforms, edges, gangways etc.

Whenever reasonably practicable fixed edge protection must be provided to prevent people falling into water.

Where edge barriers are not reasonably practicable at exposed edges, e.g. quay edges, appropriate warning signs and/or edge markings should be displayed to highlight the danger.

Work Outside Edge Barriers

Safety Nets can provide good fall protection for those carrying out occasional work outside edge barriers e.g. maintenance activities. An alternative is the use of a full body harness attached by lanyard to a suitable anchorage point or proprietary fall prevention anchorage system. Such equipment needs to be carefully selected by a competent person to ensure it is suitable for the task, checked and maintained to ensure it is kept in good order and the users instructed and trained in its use. Emergency rescue arrangements also need to be in place.

Work from Mobile Elevating Work Platforms

When working next to water, a harness should not be worn due to the risk of drowning if the work platform falls into the water. Life jackets should be worn.

Workplace Tidiness

This is of special importance when working on or near water. Tools, equipment, ropes and other materials not in use should be stored away. Waste should be cleared up promptly, and materials stacked or positioned with care.

Slippery surfaces increase the risk of people falling into water and must be properly treated to ensure good grip. Water weed, slime, bird droppings etc. should be cleaned off. Oily or greasy surfaces should have absorbent granules or grit spread on them, and icy or frosty surfaces should be treated with salt or grit.

Weather Conditions

The prevailing conditions and local weather forecast should be taken into account at the beginning of each shift. Rain, rising winds, fog, mist, etc. are all potential dangers.

Protective Clothing and Equipment

Where the work presents a risk of people being struck on the head then safety helmets must be worn. Such an injury prior to falling into water is a significant risk. Footwear with good, non-slip soles should be worn when working on or near water. Rubber boots should not be worn as, once filled, they act as a weight and could drag the wearer under water.

Life Jacket

This is a personal safety device which, when fully inflated (if inflatable), will provide sufficient buoyancy to turn and support even an unconscious person face upwards. These must be worn at all times whilst working on boats and where there is a foreseeable risk of drowning when working near to water. Those using life jackets need to be trained and instructed in their proper use and storage, and the equipment regularly inspected and maintained.

Rescue Equipment

MCA approved lifebuoys or rescue lines should be positioned at intervals along the work area. Daily checks must be made to ensure that lifebuoys and lines are in their proper place.

Work Boats and Vessels

These must meet MCA requirements in terms of their construction, use, equipment, (including safety, communication and rescue equipment) and the competence of the operator. In certain circumstances it will be necessary to provide a rescue boat standing by during work activities on or near water. For example work near tidal water or fast flowing rivers. Practice exercises in respect of rescuing people from the water will need to be carried out.

Rescue Procedure

It is important that:

Lone working is avoided to ensure there is always someone to raise the alarm.

Each person is trained in what to do in the event of an emergency.

An emergency rescue plan is in place for the work activity. The elements of a rescue procedure consists of:

- A routine for raising the alarm.
- A drill to provide the rescue facilities.
- A routine for getting the rescued person(s) appropriate medical assistance.

Rescue procedures need to be practised at regular intervals involving all persons who would be required to participate in a rescue.

Legislation

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992