

West Midlands Fire Service Water Rescue

Scrutiny Committee Briefing Note

Water Safety Advice

Drowning is the third most common cause of accidental deaths of those under 16 years of age, particularly during July and August. The majority (85%) of all drownings in the UK happen in open water such as rivers, canals, lakes, quarries and reservoirs.

Unfortunately many victims misjudge how well they can swim, often unaware of how cold the water can be and what this does to their stamina and strength. Young children can drown in just a couple of inches of water, and most drownings of children aged five or under happen in or around the home.

Capability, Incidents and Response Times

West Midlands Fire Service believes in operational excellence and through our Integrated Risk Management Plan we prepare for all foreseeable risks. One of those risks is water related incidents that can involve rescues from lakes, canals and waterways or pluvial or fluvial flooding.

West Midlands Fire Service has the ability to respond to these types of incidents through both equipment and competent firefighters. Our firefighters are trained to 5 different levels:

- Level 1 - Water Awareness - WMFS Voluntary water rescue swimmers

All fire fighters are trained to this level and all of our response vehicles carry life jackets to enable us to work near water.

- Level 2 - Water Rescue First Responder

Seven of our fire stations are trained to this level and flood suits are kept at our technical rescue stations. Level 2 personnel water rescue deployed to wading water incidents where personnel can lead persons to safety.

- Level 3 - Water Rescue Technician

Specialist Rescue Personnel who have been trained in all aspects of water rescue and can deploy systems of work that allow a person to enter the water to affect a rescue in moving water.

- Level 4 - Water Rescue Power Boat Operator

Our Technical rescue crews are able to operate power rescue craft.

- Level 5 - Water Incident Management

Our Technical Rescue crews are trained to be able to advise and command at water incidents.

- Level 6 - Subject Matter Advisors

We also have a station commander trained to provide tactical advice in relation to major or wide-spread Flood or Water Rescue Incidents nationally.

The equipment provided to crews ranges from life jackets, flood suit, dry suits through to Power Boats. These resources are located across our delivery area based upon our Integrated Risk Management Plan. These resources are also available for national deployment and we have supported a range of flooding incidents across the country.

There were 35 water incidents last year (2015/16), and there have already been 31 this year to date. The majority of these incidents relate to flooding in June 2016.

The average (median) attendance time for these water rescue incidents in 2015/16 was 5 minutes and 44 seconds and year to date is 7 minutes and 8 seconds. The reason for the increase in the response time during the year to date is that the majority of incidents occurred in June through two periods of flooding where simultaneous incidents occurred across our delivery area.