

Staying Alive



ROSPA
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Prevention of Accidents

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Tombstoning -
a risk too far

Water safety

Taking a giant leap in



nto danger

By David Walker

Don't jump into the unknown

This is the key message being conveyed to would-be tombstoners this year.

A summer-long awareness campaign was launched to coincide with the first May Bank Holiday weekend to inform those thinking about tombstoning along the coast and other known incident hotspots.

The campaign's aim is to provide a balanced message to the would-be participant on the web, through information available at the locality or through speaking directly to rescue/enforcement authorities.

The culmination of this advice is to equip the participant with a fair assessment of the hazards, enabling them to make an informed choice about whether to jump or not and to help the rescue services to help them if they get into trouble.

Injuries and deaths as a result of tombstoning have been a recurring problem. Over the last five years, 139 incidents required a rescue or emergency response, 12 of these ending with a fatality. We looked at 41 of the most serious cases in more detail, and of these cases:

- Males were predominately involved (85 per cent)
- Teens were involved in more than half the cases (55 per cent), followed by those in their 20s (25 per cent) with the remainder comprising of those aged 30-40 years
- All of the known alcohol-related incidents involved males above 40 years - a quarter of all fatal incidents
- Of the non-fatal incidents, spinal and limb injuries (both at 20 per cent) were most commonly reported.

Many of the non-fatal incidents have resulted in life-changing injuries and required significant resources from the rescue services. Young and older fathers were among the fatalities, along with at least three teenagers.



Last summer, a number of the serious incidents caused widespread concern among the police and rescue services and resulted in coverage in the mainstream media, with calls from some quarters to "ban" and prosecute "reckless teens who put themselves and others at risk" (not RoSPA's views).

Given the level of harm and the numerous calls to manage or regulate the activity, there was a clear need to have a response to the media and professionals, along with good advice for the public about an activity which has few barriers to entry – but potentially serious consequences if done without due care.

RoSPA, working with members of the National Beach

Safety Council, RNLI, MCA, RLSS, tombstoning participants and coaststeering providers, initiated a project to see how best we could manage the risks

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associated with the activity. One of the key outcomes from that working group was the need to provide a balanced message about the dangers involved in tombstoning and offer common-sense advice, balancing the viral media that many see on YouTube and other websites.

The campaign uses a range of media outlets with presence on the web, posters and

information at hotspots, and face-to-face advice from beach life-guards, coastguard and police officers. In addition, a co-ordinated media response by the campaign partners - MCA, RNLI and RoSPA - has been organised to help keep the message present throughout the summer months.

Running with the key message of "Don't jump into the unknown", the campaign is essentially trying to get participants to think about the dangers involved before they make their choice about whether to jump. The underlying messages highlight the specific hazards and offer a rationale for decision-making.

Tombstoning can be dangerous because:

- Water depth alters with the tide – the water may be shallower than it seems
- Submerged objects like rocks may not be visible – they can cause serious injury if you jump onto them
- The shock of cold water may make it difficult to swim
- Strong currents can rapidly sweep people away.

Those who wish to participate in tombstoning can manage the risks by remembering the following advice:

- Check for hazards in the water. Rocks or submerged objects under the sea may not be visible through the surface
- Check the depth of the water. Remember tides can rise or fall very quickly – it may start off deep enough but can quickly become shallower
- As a rule of thumb, a jump of 10 metres requires a depth of at least five metres
- Never jump while under the influence of alcohol, drugs or peer pressure
- Consider the risk to others.

Water safety

A giant leap into danger

Conditions can change rapidly

- Remember young people could be watching and attempt to mimic the activity
- Check for access, it may be impossible to get out of the water

months and recognise that risk-taking is a healthy part of life. But they are keen to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries associated with tombstoning. Equipping would-be participants with the knowledge and skills necessary

Think about the dangers involved before they make their choice about whether to jump.

The information was chosen to try to offer a rational argument about the dangers involved and to point out the key hazards that have caused a number of the serious or fatal incidents.

The campaign partners want people to enjoy the summer

to make informed choices is a crucial way to achieve this.

For more information on the campaign members can contact David Walker at RoSPA (djwalker@rospa.com) or Richard Jackson at MCA (Richard.Jackson@mca.gov.uk)



Water safety for holidays

With the holidays ahead the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents is urging people to think carefully about how they and their family can enjoy water safely.

In previous years, there has been a link between periods of hot weather and an increase in accidental drowning deaths, particularly in inland waters such as rivers, lakes, lochs and canals.

A number of recent drownings in a range of settings also serves as a tragic reminder of the dangers water can pose.

Peter Cornall, RoSPA head of leisure safety, said: "RoSPA promotes the idea that life should be as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible. We want people to get out and about, including to enjoy the water.

"But as people turn their attention to swimming or simply cooling off in the water, we encourage them to think through the risks first and to make sure they know what to do if someone gets into difficulty. That way, they

can make informed decisions about the locations in which they choose to swim.

"Each year, there are more accidental drowning deaths in inland waters than in any other type of water and people need to understand the hazards they might encounter in these locations.

"Remember that even on a hot day, the water might be a lot colder than you were expecting and there may be strong currents and underwater debris that you cannot see from the bank. Be honest about your swimming ability and remember that alcohol and swimming do not mix. Children should never swim alone at unsupervised locations and adults accompanying them should have the skills to assess the hazards and know what to do if anything goes wrong."

Swimming at a properly-supervised site, such as a beach, lido or swimming pool, is the best option, although RoSPA understands that not everyone is able

to go to these locations.

Each year, in addition to accidental drowning deaths in public places, a number of children lose their lives after falling into ponds or other containers of water in the garden or after getting into difficulty in paddling pools. In fact, an average of five children under the age of six-years-old drown in garden ponds in the UK each year.

Peter Cornall said: "Children under four-years-old are particularly at risk because they can easily get into the water, but often cannot get themselves out again.

"Our advice to parents is to look around the garden from a child's perspective to see if there is any water that they could climb or fall into. Then consider how best to isolate these items. We recommend filling in a pond while the children are young or, if this isn't possible, covering it with a rigid grille or, for a larger pond, surrounding it with a secure fence with a lockable gate.

"However, supervision is the most effective way of preventing accidents to young children. We have heard of cases where parents have been temporarily distracted, for example by a telephone call, and a child has wandered away and got into difficulty in water.

"As children get older, teach them about water safety, and, as a parent, make sure you know what to do in an emergency."

The most recent fully-analysed UK drowning statistics are for 2005, when there were 435 suspected accidental drownings (inland - 234; coastal zone - 130; residential location - 38; sea - 26; and swimming pool - seven).

See www.rospa.com/leisure/safety/information/ for advice about preventing accidental drownings at home and when you are out and about.

See www.rospa.com/leisure/safety/water/statistics/2005/statistics.htm for an analysis of the accidental drowning fatalities which occurred in 2005.



Out of this nettle, danger, we
pluck this flower, safety.

W. Shakespeare

National Water Safety Congress 2009

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9 -10 November 2009, Hilton Hotel, Cardiff.

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