

# Staying Alive

**ROSPA**  
The Royal Society for the  
Prevention of Accidents

ISSN 1354-2249

November 2009

**Wearing  
your safety**



## Lifejackets

# Message to sailors u



By Richard Jackson

If you're reading this article, chances are you have at least a slight interest in recreational boating or maritime safety. If that is the case I hope that, one way or another, you will have come into contact with the campaign currently being run by the MCA, RYA, and RNLI which promotes the wearing of lifejackets amongst recreational boaters.

The joint campaign has been running for almost two years in

drowned in the UK in 2008 could have survived had they been wearing a lifejacket.

This figure comes from a 'panel review' of experts who looked at each fatal incident in 2008 where the casualty could have reasonably been expected to wear a lifejacket. A consensus decision was made in each case as to whether it could have saved their life. The panel consisted of members from the RYA, RNLI and MCA,

**Eighty four per cent of people who drowned in the UK in 2008 could have survived had they been wearing a lifejacket**

an effort to challenge the pre-conceptions of those who don't think twice about putting on a car seatbelt, but wouldn't think at all about putting on a lifejacket.

For those whose first question might be 'why lifejackets?' here is an insight into the thinking behind the campaign.

Firstly, the statistics. Eighty four per cent of people who

as well as the MAIB, industry and academia.

In addition, Portsmouth University have independently conducted research into more than 900 cases of cold water immersion between 1991 and 2001. Their research showed that death occurred in 45 per cent of cases where the casualty was not wearing a lifejacket and

## On the water front

### Hot weather sees a spate of drownings

Temperatures in the UK soared, earlier this year, emulating weather more commonly seen in some popular summer holiday destinations. As a result the latter part of May and early June saw a high number of drownings. Over just a couple of weeks it is believed that there were as many as 25 incidents as a result of people entering the water intentionally, typically to cool off and enjoy a swim.

### Holiday water park tragedy

A 14 year old boy has died after being sucked into a swimming pool plant pumping system while on holiday in Thailand. It is believed Nathan Clark Griffiths from the Isle of Man, opened a vent at the bottom of the pool to retrieve his goggles.

Currently an investigation is underway by local police to determine how Nathan was able to lift the grille. Both parents have been critical of the time it took lifeguards to act at the Water Park in Pattaya, east of Bangkok.

### Tenby rescue from sandbank

A group of young people aged between 10 and 20 years old were saved by RNLI lifeguards when a sandbank collapsed. The group were on a team building exercise walking backwards into the sea, fully clothed and singing.

Luckily a lifeguard was approaching the group of 40, including four adults to warn them of the dangers, when suddenly they plunged into the water. Fortunately nobody was hurt.

### British girl saves another child's life

A nine year old British girl saved a four year old from drowning while on holiday in Sri Lanka. Yasmin Tinnon, from Hayton Cumbria, stayed calm when the non-swimmer mother of the victim starting screaming in panic, swam over to the child and pulled her out.

Yasmin's parents have highlighted the importance of teaching swimming to children, although they never imagined the lifesaving skills she learnt would be used in a real situation.

# useless if not worn

only three per cent of those where they were. So the stats show that wearing a lifejacket is worthwhile.

But you can prove anything with stats can't you? So here are some common sense reasons to do so;

- It only takes 1.5 litres of sea water to drown and in the first few minutes of immersion into the water, the involuntary gasp reflex can make drowning a real possibility no matter how strong a swimmer you are. A lifejacket will keep your airways clear of water.
- In the majority of cases vigorous body movement such as swimming increases the cooling rate of the body, leading to hypothermia. A lifejacket will keep you afloat without you having to swim or tread water.
- A lifejacket will keep you afloat even if you're unconscious when you enter the water.
- A lifejacket, especially one with reflective strips or a light, will make you more visible to rescuers and a crutch strap will enable them to pull you from the water with ease.

In fact there are so many reasons to wear a lifejacket that it becomes easier to look at the reasons why people don't, which is exactly what the MCA are doing with the latest piece of research.

In attempting to change people's attitudes towards lifejacket wear, we've commissioned a project to look at the underlying behaviour behind the reasons that people give for not wearing them.

It is one of many initiatives we are involved in with our partners as part of the campaign, in addition to more overt strategies such as posters, stickers, shows, and generally working to energise manufacturers of lifejackets to make positive changes to improve their design.

The lifejacket campaign is just one of five key aspects that the MCA are addressing as part of their strategy for the recreational sector.

While taking every opportunity to encourage people to have fun and enjoy leisure activities at sea and at the coast, we also want to enable them to plan ahead, make more informed choices and take personal responsibility for their safety. Our five key safety messages are;

- Get trained
- Check the weather and tides
- Wear a lifejacket
- Avoid Alcohol
- Keep in touch

The aim is to focus on these five key messages in partnership with appropriate bodies, such as the RNLI, the RYA, and RoSPA, and wherever possible with the support of the NWSF.

At the RoSPA Water Safety Congress this year I'll be hosting a Lifejacket workshop and practical demo, so come along, seek me out, and learn some more about why your Lifejacket is Useless Unless Worn. You can't miss me; I'll be the one wearing a lifejacket.

- Richard Jackson is evidence coordinator for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. For more information about the MCA's Lifejacket Campaign, e-mail [Richard.jackson@mca.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.jackson@mca.gov.uk)

**YOUR LIFEJACKET**

**USELESS  
UNLESS  
WORN**

Useless unless worn

Produced by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the RNLI and the RYA to encourage more boaters to wear lifejackets whilst afloat.

## Case study - Friday April 24, 2009, visitor's pontoon, River Medina, Cowes

"Having moored up securely I was just putting a final adjustment on the bow line to take it out through the fairlead.

Having untied the line from the pontoon end to get more line I pulled in the bow from the pontoon when the bow of the boat drifted out, leaving me clinging on the boat toe rail with my legs in the water.

With springs and stern lines still on the boat the bow had only drifted out and I was able to work my way down the side of the boat to the stern quarter which was now blocking my way round to the stern ladder.

I was between the pontoon and the boat and could not climb out onto the pontoon or up the side of the boat.

While I was clinging to the toe rail of the boat with just my legs in the water I had forgotten I was wearing a lifejacket, but when I tried to get round to the stern ladder by

unsuccessfully trying to squeeze between the pontoon and the stern quarter of the boat, the lifejacket inflated.

I did not feel in any danger, however, when it did inflate I realised how tired I was getting, having been hanging on for what was probably about no more than five minutes, but when it inflated it gave me a chance for a brief and very comfortable rest.

A kind stranger, who rowed over from another pontoon, managed to haul me up onto the pontoon and I discovered the value of the crutch strap. I felt that, had I not been wearing the lifejacket over my head, or at least high enough to start suffocating me.

It can be argued that the lifejacket did not save me that night. But what it did bring home is the definition of accidents – they happen when you aren't expecting them."