

PRESS RELEASE

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ENJOY YOUR TIME ON THE TOWPATH SAFELY THIS WINTER

Winter water safety videos - <https://bit.ly/2Zxj55p>

Canal & River Trust, the waterways and wellbeing charity which cares for 2,000 miles of water in England and Wales, is encouraging people to enjoy wintery walks on the towpath, but to do so safely.

Ahead of the temperature plummeting this winter, and in partnership with the West Midlands Fire Service and the National Fire Chiefs Council, the charity has launched two videos about what to do if you or someone else ends up in the water this winter.

The videos demonstrate what to do in an emergency should you fall in, or if you find someone else in the water, and are a reminder to take extra care on the towpaths while enjoying the waterways this winter. The waterways are beautiful places to spend time when it's frosty and snowy – and look great on Instagram - but on wet and icy towpaths, or when distracted by a mobile phone, the risk of slipping, tripping or falling into freezing water can increase.

Anne Gardner-Aston, director of health and safety at the Canal & River Trust, said:

“For the millions of people living alongside them, especially in our towns and cities where green space is at a premium, canals and rivers can provide a boost to health, happiness and wellbeing. The waterways look beautiful in the frost and snow and it's no wonder people want to head to the towpath for a wintery walk. However, with the cold temperatures and the dark afternoons and nights, it's even more important to remember to take care when walking, running or cycling next to water.

“We're very pleased to join forces with the West Midlands Fire Service and the National Fire Chiefs Council to promote these important safety messages. When it's very cold it's all too easy to slip on ice or wet ground and fall in. Even if you know the towpath like the back of your hand, one wrong step and you could end up in freezing cold water. So our message is to take care near the edge of the water, especially festive drinkers celebrating in waterside bars and pubs, go with someone or tell someone where you are going.”

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Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH65 4FW

Top tips if you fall into the water this winter:

- Call for help
- Try to stand up
- If you can't stand up, lie on your back in a star shape until help arrives.

Top tips if you find someone in the water this winter:

- Stay on the towpath - DO NOT enter the water to help them
- Call the emergency services
- Shout to them to swim to you
- Try to find something to help them stay afloat
- Lie with your whole body on the towpath and try to reach them with a scarf or a long stick.

Towpaths, bridges and lock-sides can become slippery at this time of year and snow can conceal boat mooring rings and ropes which, unless people are paying attention, can be easy to trip over. And whilst frozen canals look beautiful no-one should ever attempt to walk on or test the thickness of the ice. Dog walkers are advised to keep dogs on leads during a freeze in case they run onto ice, and to never follow their pet on to a frozen canal.

Dawn Whittaker, Drowning Prevention Lead for the National Fire Chiefs Council and chair of the National Water Safety Forum, says: "The National Fire Chiefs Council encourage people to be water aware and these short videos are a great way to learn how to help if you or someone else should find themselves in the water. "

The videos are introduced by Shammi Rana, a Watch Commander with West Midlands Fire Service's Technical Rescue Unit whose firefighters also feature.

Watch Commander Rana said: "The two videos provide simple but important information for anyone who enjoys being by water. We'd encourage people to watch and share them as widely as possible.

"The best thing is, of course, to stay safe and avoid ending up in the water in the first place. Should the worst happen, don't hesitate to call the fire service on 999. We have firefighters who are experts in water rescue and ready to respond 24/7 with appropriate equipment and training."

Families should make sure that young children are kept within sight and made aware of the importance of staying away from the edge. The Trust offers free water safety assemblies to primary schools, either in person or online. To book an assembly, or for more information about teaching children how to stay safe near water, go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers/water-safety>

To find out more about staying safe near the water go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/safety-on-our-waterways/winter-water-safety>

Tag @CanalRiverTrust in your winter waterway Instagram photos this winter with #BeWaterSafe #RespectTheWater

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk / @CanalRiverTrust / @crtcomms

The Canal & River Trust is a member of the **National Water Safety Forum**. The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) was established in 2004, bringing together a diverse group of organisations with an interest in drowning prevention and water safety. Since its inception, the NWSF and its network has enabled some fantastic collaborative work to reduce drowning and improve water safety.

Spurred on by the World Health Organization report that recommended every country should have a national water safety and drowning prevention plan, the NWSF has developed the first UK Drowning Prevention Strategy - <https://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/strategy>

Don't Drink and Drown campaign

Don't Drink and Drown is the Royal Life Saving Society UK's national campaign that encourages smart decision making whilst intoxicated around water. It particularly targets individuals to be responsible for their friends if they have had too much to drink; aiding them to return home safely.

On average 73 people lose their lives each year through a substance-related drowning. For context, this is over 20% of the annual accidental drowning fatalities.

The campaign was launched following a string of tragic and high-profile student drownings in 2014.

National Fire Chiefs Council

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is the professional voice of the UK fire and rescue service. It drives improvement and development throughout the UK FRS, while supporting strong leadership – including for the devolved administrations. NFCC delivers an approach where everyone works together and offers up sector-led solutions.

West Midlands Fire Service

WMFS's job is to keep the 2.9 million people of the West Midlands safe. We serve a diverse population across Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton. We're the second largest fire and rescue service in England, covering an area of 902 square kilometres which include areas with the highest risk in England outside of London. We operate 38 whole-fire stations across the West Midlands with over 1200 firefighters working to make the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier.