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Tombstoning and coasteering: Essential safety advice from the RNLI following tragic fatalities

Within the past week, there have been two fatalities as a result of people tombstoning and taking part in coasteering without being organised by a professional provider. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) is urging anyone considering taking part in these high-risk activities to be cautious and take the correct safety measures at all times.

A teenage boy died off the coast of Sunderland last Wednesday (13 May) after jumping from a cliff and getting into serious difficulties in the water. In a separate incident on Saturday (16 May) a man died in rough seas while coasteering off of New Quay in Wales.

Steve Wills, RNLI Beach Safety Manager, says: 'Our thoughts are with the families of those who died in these tragic incidents. Unfortunately, they highlight that, although tombstoning and coasteering are intended to be fun, they can be dangerous, especially if the appropriate precautions aren't taken. The group involved in the incident at New Quay was not under the supervision of a professionally trained leader. We advise people to choose a coasteering school with professionally trained staff, appropriate safety procedures and the correct equipment.

'RNLI volunteer lifeboat crews were involved in the search and rescue operation on both occasions. These activities are becoming increasingly popular and, with summer approaching, we expect there will be more of these incidents unless people make safety a priority. Our crews are on-call 24/7 to launch to emergencies at sea, but they are hoping they do not have to respond to any more incidents like this.'

Steve explains the differences between the two activities:

'Tombstoning involves jumping or diving from a height into water. It is a high-risk activity, which is unregulated and is usually undertaken without supervision. Coasteering involves travelling along a stretch of coastline, usually with a group. It involves travelling across rocks and through water, using a variety of techniques including climbing, scrambling, swimming and jumping into water. We urge those who are thinking of taking part in either tombstoning or coasteering to remember the safety advice we offer on our website, www.rnli.org.uk/beachsafety.'

The RNLI's advice on tombstoning and coasteering is as follows:

Tombstoning

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 reduce 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 ten 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. 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

Coasteering

At present, there is no formal accreditation scheme for coasteering schools so people should select a school carefully. The RNLI advises only taking part in coasteering as part of a group, which has:

- Professionally trained staff (both technical and water safety based)
- Adequate insurance cover
- Safety equipment (helmets, wetsuits etc)
- Emergency evacuation / accident procedures
- Pre-defined routes

When coasteering is conducted by a well-trained leader using appropriate techniques and equipment, there is a much lower risk of getting hurt.

The RNLI is a member of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF). As part of its role in this forum, the RNLI heads a national group comprising water safety organisations (including the MCA and RoSPA) and coasteering providers to address the varying standards between different coasteering centres. Key areas under review are the development of a national training framework for coasteering guides, safety protocols and emergency action plans.

Notes to editors

- RNLI spokespeople are available for interview or comment. Please contact RNLI Public Relations on the numbers below.
- **National Water Safety Forum (NWSF)** The National Water Safety Forum is the body in which organisations involved in water safety participate in order to have a strong voice with Government on water safety issues. The Forum is primarily concerned with preventative action and water safety education.

RNLI media contacts

For more information, please contact Laura Fennimore, RNLI Public Relations Officer, on 01202 663181 or email lfennimore@rnli.org.uk. Alternatively, contact RNLI Public Relations on 01202 336789 or email pressoffice@rnli.org.uk.

RNLI online

For more information on the RNLI please visit www.rnli.org.uk. News releases and other media resources, including RSS feeds, downloadable photos and video, are available at the RNLI Press Centre www.rnli.org.uk/press

Key facts about the RNLI

The RNLI charity saves lives at sea. Its volunteers provide a 24-hour search and rescue service around the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland coasts. The RNLI operates over 230 lifeboat stations in the UK and Ireland and has more than 100 lifeguard units on beaches around the UK. The RNLI is independent of Coastguard and government and depends on voluntary donations and legacies to maintain its rescue service. Since the RNLI was founded in 1824 its lifeboat crews and lifeguards have saved over 137,000 lives.

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