



Water Safety Policy for First Responders (Surrey and Sussex) (1184/2025)

Abstract

This policy provides decision making and safety guidance to Surrey Police and Sussex Police officers and staff who are the first responders at water-based incidents.

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Water based incidents are on the increase in Surrey and Sussex, but as in most forces, police officers and police staff are not trained or equipped to enter the water to affect a rescue. Furthermore, there is a lack of utilisation of the Submerged Persons Tool approved by the Resuscitation Council UK, National Ambulance Service Medical Directors (NASMED) and Joint Royal Colleges Ambulance Liaison Committee (JRCALC). The task of rescuing members of the public from water lies primarily with other emergency services who are trained and equipped to undertake such tasks.

1.2 However, in most cases, it is a police officer or a member of police staff who is the first person to arrive at the scene and who often feel an overwhelming responsibility to assess the incident and attempt a water rescue. There is also an expectation from the public that first responders will take immediate action to affect a rescue and this added pressure to act could mean that judgement becomes clouded.

1.3 This policy is aimed specifically at those first responders on scene to utilise the Submerged Persons Tool and provide key water awareness through the Water Safety Guidance Toolkit (SMS0046). These tools will allow effective decision making as to the survivability of a casualty and will promote a greater understanding and acknowledgement of the dangers water rescues pose and to provide guidance on safe working practices.

2. Scope

2.1 The Water Safety Guidance Toolkit (SMS0046) underpins this policy and details the various water related incidents that officers may be called upon to attend as first responders. It also provides:

- Safe working considerations and practices.
- Risk and dangers.
- Rescue options.
- Hierarchy of Controls.

2.2 The Submerged Persons Tool

It is our duty to establish the status of a person in a water incident and act accordingly. The National Health Service (NHS) led a review of the tool including clinical evidence, stakeholder engagement, independent evaluation of its interpretation by responders by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Behavioural Science and Insights Unit to produce a revised version approved by the Resuscitation Council UK, National Ambulance Service Medical Directors (NASMED) and Joint Royal Colleges Ambulance Liaison Committee (JRCALC).

The model considers when the person was last seen, age and size of the person under water, the water temperature and any potential for air pockets to inform whether a rescue or recovery operation is required see The Submerged Persons Tool.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Surrey Police and Sussex Police recognise the importance of a correct assessment as to the status of the incident – if this is a survivable person in water incident or a recovery operation of a deceased person.

3.2 Surrey Police and Sussex Police understand that police officers and staff would feel an overwhelming responsibility to attempt a water rescue within the 90 minute window of a rescue operation as detailed in the Submerged Persons Tool. However, it is imperative that officers do not put themselves, colleagues, or members of the public at risk.

3.3 Whilst our duty will always be to protect life and limb, police officers and staff should not put themselves in unnecessary danger by trying to undertake a rescue during the 90 minute rescue window they are not trained or equipped to undertake. They are NOT required to enter water but are expected to carry out a Risk Assessment of the situation in line with the Submerged Person Tool.

3.4 We do not expect or require any member of staff to enter water in a rescue attempt of animals under any circumstances.

Procedure

1. Emergency Services

1.1 There are a number of emergency services who provide specialist water rescue services and who will always be given primacy over any water related incident where the lives of people are at risk.

1.2 The appropriate service will be alerted to the incident via the Force Control Room (FCR) Surrey or Force Command and Control Communications Department (FCCCD) Sussex. Terminology of 'person in the water' will be used if the status of the casualty is not known or cannot be determined.

1.3 Surrey Police and Sussex Police already have in place a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with East and West Sussex & Surrey Fire and Rescue Services to provide the following services in relation to water,

- Wade searching including in swift water environments.
- Inland water boat capability.

The full MoU can be found on the Search Unit Intranet pages within the Ops Command Teams.

2. Water Safety Equipment

2.1 Some Surrey Police and Sussex Police marked vehicles carry a 'throw-line' as part of the standard car equipment. In accordance with the Police Driving Policy (Surrey and Sussex) (616) at least once a month, supervisors will inspect each vehicle for which they are responsible, to ensure that the throw-line is properly stowed in its proprietary bag and is fit for deployment, alongside the road worthiness of the vehicle.

3. Police officers / Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) and Supervisors Responsibilities

3.1 All drivers of marked police vehicles shall ensure that the throw-line is packed / repacked in accordance with the supplier's instruction, (See Throw Line Toolkit (SMS0047)) maintained and stowed in the vehicle so as not to compromise its integrity etc.

3.2 Divisional Commanders / Departmental Heads should ensure that monitoring processes are in place and vehicle logbooks are inspected to ensure drivers are completing them when they drive a vehicle.

Team: Response