

Press Release from Buckinghamshire Council

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Emergency services across the Thames Valley join forces with to share important water safety message

As the weather starts to get warmer, emergency services, local authorities and the Environment Agency will be working together across the Thames Valley to share how to stay safe by the water and how simple changes and techniques could save a life.

Following tragic deaths in the water over the last few years in the Thames Valley, Thames Valley Police, Buckinghamshire and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services, the Environment Agency, South Central Ambulance Service, Buckinghamshire Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead have all been working together with the aim of warning and informing residents of how to stay safe by the water, particularly with young people who often head to the water side when schools are closed.

As a partnership, we are thrilled to be working with Olympic swimmer Tom Dean MBE on this important topic. A short water safety video is being shared across the Thames Valley that features Tom and includes advice around safe open water swimming, the dangers of jumping from bridges and what to do if you find yourself in trouble in the water.

Tom is a double Olympic gold medallist, winning gold individually in 200 metre freestyle and as part of a team in 4 × 200 m freestyle relay at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. He grew up in Maidenhead and is very passionate about the issue of water safety, having lived near the Jubilee Flood Relief Channel, a popular open water spot in Berkshire.

The video will be played on school buses covering the area around the Jubilee Flood Relief Channel and school inputs on water safety will be delivered by Fire and Rescue services in the final half term of the school year.

Over the summer, all agencies will be participating in joint patrols of the riverside and running a number of safety events on hot, sunny days when these areas are busiest.

Neighbourhood Inspector James Ellis, Thames Valley Police, said: "When someone finds themselves in difficulty in the water, it's terrifying for those involved and brings together all agencies as life

savers. No life should be lost to the water and I really hope this work helps ensure everyone can enjoy the water safely.

“We know that younger people particularly are less likely to engage with messages from statutory agencies so we’re really grateful to Tom in joining us as trusted voice for this audience, to help impress the importance of these messages.”

Tim Readings, Group Manager, RBFRS, said: “Drowning is preventable and one drowning is one too many. We are urging people to take care around Berkshire’s waterways this year. There are numerous natural and man-made hazards located in our waterways, such as varying water currents, weirs, reed beds and dangerous objects beneath the surface that have been carelessly discarded.

“Cold water is another hazard that can have serious consequences and can endanger even the strongest swimmers. Even on a warm day the temperature in open water can remain very cold, causing cold water shock. If you find yourself in trouble, try not to panic and remember ‘Float To Live’.

“If you do see someone in difficulty remember ‘Call, Tell and Throw – Call 999, tell the person to float on their back and throw something to them to help them float.”

Stuart Grosse, Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service Group Commander and lead officer for water safety, said: “We hope the tips within this video help raise awareness of ways young people can keep themselves, their mates, and others safe should they find themselves near any stretch of open water.

“This new initiative, playing the video on school busses and in classroom visits, allows us to share transferable information with a key audience. The advice provided about cold-water shock, how to float to live, and what you can do to help if you see someone struggling in water, can be applied whether you are by a river, lake or even a beach.

“Our hope is that those watching this video won’t ever be in a situation where they need to draw on it, but should the situation arise, they will be able to draw on the contents and in doing so, increase the chances of a life being saved.”

Thomas Broom, Buckinghamshire Council’s Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Safety, said: “As tempting as it may be when it’s hot outside, we would urge people to be sensible and only venture into the water where and when it is safe to do so. Any area of open water can have hidden dangers that you don’t become aware of until it is too late. There are lots of places you can swim safely outdoors or indoors in Buckinghamshire so please make sure you follow the advice to keep you and your family and friends safe in the water this summer.”

Deb Forder, Safety Manager for Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service, said: "Open water can look appealing, especially on warm days, but it is also very dangerous. That is why we are offering some important practical advice, particularly as we approach summer when residents are more likely to be tempted to take a dip.

"Please consider things such as letting friends and family know your route near water and what time you should return. Carrying a whistle to draw attention if you do get into difficulties."

"There are many hazards under the surface that may entrap you or cause serious injury. Using supervised venues or swimming pools is much safer.

"Even on a warm day, the temperature of a body of open water can remain very cold. Falling or intentionally jumping into water can result in a cold shock response."

James Amos, Head of Resilience and Specialist Operations at South Central Ambulance Service, said: "We urge everyone to be cautious around water. The water may look enticing, but you may never be fully aware how deep the water is, how you may be affected by the temperature, how fast the currents are or what objects might be at the bottom. If you ever see anyone in difficulty in water, call 999 immediately and always keep the person in view."

Maria Herlihy, Operations Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

"The Bank Holiday was the first really hot weekend of the year, though the waters in the Thames were still bitterly cold. We had a chilly, wet spring and just last weekend the water temperature had been only 14 Degrees Centigrade – sudden exposure to this could easily have caused cold water shock which could immobilise or even kill."

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