

Stay safe: working near water

By safely disposing of your liquid waste, you are helping to protect the natural environment. But it's important to protect yourself and others too.

Working near or over water has a number of safety risks including slips and falls at the water's edge, cold water shock, exposure to contaminated water and death through drowning.

Over 200¹ people die from accidental drowning across the UK each year. It's important to take all necessary steps to safeguard yourself, your colleagues and the general public.

Before starting work on site:

- Carry out a site specific risk assessment and method statement
- Put in place an appropriate rescue plan
- Make sure suitable equipment and materials are available; including personal protective equipment (PPE) such as harness, slip-resistant footwear etc.

Whilst on site:

- Make sure pathways and platforms are dry and clear of obstructions
- Clean and grit walkways to reduce the risk of slippage
- Check the condition of steps and stairways and secure ladders and handrails
- Close access gates at all times to safeguard children and the general public
- Check the water depth and flow – it only takes a few cm of water to drown
- Check that buoyancy aids are in good condition and easily accessible
- Use circuit breakers when using electrical equipment to avoid electric shock
- Isolate moving equipment such as moving bridges
- Use a harness and make sure a second person is present when working near channels or on the banks of lagoons, rivers or reservoirs
- Use a banksman when reversing vehicles and plant close to water.

1. www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk

Working near waste water

When working near rivers or at waste water treatment works there is the added danger of water-borne diseases caused by parasites, bacteria and viruses.

These include gastroenteritis, hepatitis, occupational asthma and leptospirosis (Weil's disease) which can pose serious long-term and life threatening health risks (read our 'Waste Water Hygiene' guide for more details).

In addition, there is also the risk of drowning in aeration tanks which have less buoyancy due to the presence of air bubbles.

Prevent the risk of accidents:

- Keep rescue equipment such as floats and hooks available near all tanks
- Ensure all procedures for confined spaces are followed
- Wear full protection gear when working over an unguarded tank
- Cordon off areas and place warning signs when grates are lifted to access tanks
- Guard all moving machinery and ensure it is regularly maintained.

Please seek medical attention immediately after suffering cuts or penetrating injuries; or have flu-like illnesses or fever, particularly when associated with severe headaches and skin infections.

