

# Minimise the **RISK**

**Pics:** Geoffrey Lee, HM Coastguard and Peter Tranter

Stand up paddleboarding is a fantastic way to enjoy the UK coast but sometimes paddlers can find themselves in need of assistance from the Coastguard, RNLI and independent lifeboats. Even the most experienced can be caught out.

Sea conditions can change in an instant and when they do, it's important to be prepared. Nobody ever intends to end up in trouble – and when it happens, it happens fast, rarely giving a person a chance to think let alone call the Coastguard. That's why it's important to make sure you minimise the risk in case the worst should happen. HM Coastguard recommends that stand up paddlers should follow these simple, potentially life-saving tips...

## **Wear a buoyancy aid**

People should steer away from thinking that a buoyancy aid is an emergency device. It's by far a paddleboarder's best friend on the water and needs to be thought of as a standard piece of clothing – just like putting on a pair of socks... worn 100% of the time. If you go into the sea and get detached from your board you're protected and will remain afloat, otherwise your chances of survival could be greatly impacted.

Worn correctly, a well-fitting buoyancy aid will provide a paddleboarder with precious survival time until help arrives. Advances in technology mean that they are not the bulky items they once were years ago.

If you do find yourself in the water wearing a buoyancy aid, it will give you a chance to raise the alarm with the Coastguard. If you've attached your PLB (Personal Locator Beacon – more on this coming up!) it will allow rescuers to pinpoint where you are and reach you more quickly. These devices are now very reasonably priced and readily available online.





## How to raise the alarm

Once things start to go wrong, they can develop rapidly – in our experience people often don't even have a chance to raise the alarm. Don't wait for things to improve – you should inform the Coastguard as soon as a potentially difficult situation is developing. We can never get time back – speed is of the utmost importance.

Keep your mobile phone in sealed plastic wallet which will ensure that your phone remains functional despite the conditions. Keeping your phone dry is absolutely essential. Make sure the phone wallet is within reaching distance – you might consider wearing it around your neck. Above all, make sure your phone is fully charged before setting out. Avoid paddleboarding alone in remote spots and always paddle with a partner where you can. If mobile network coverage is poor then you might not be able to make a mobile call at all so you might want to consider investing in a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB).

A PLB is a small device that is ideally attached to a buoyancy aid or worn around the neck of the user. When activated it will send an emergency alert via a satellite to our Mission Control Centre who will then relay the information to the co-ordinating Coastguard Operations' Centres.

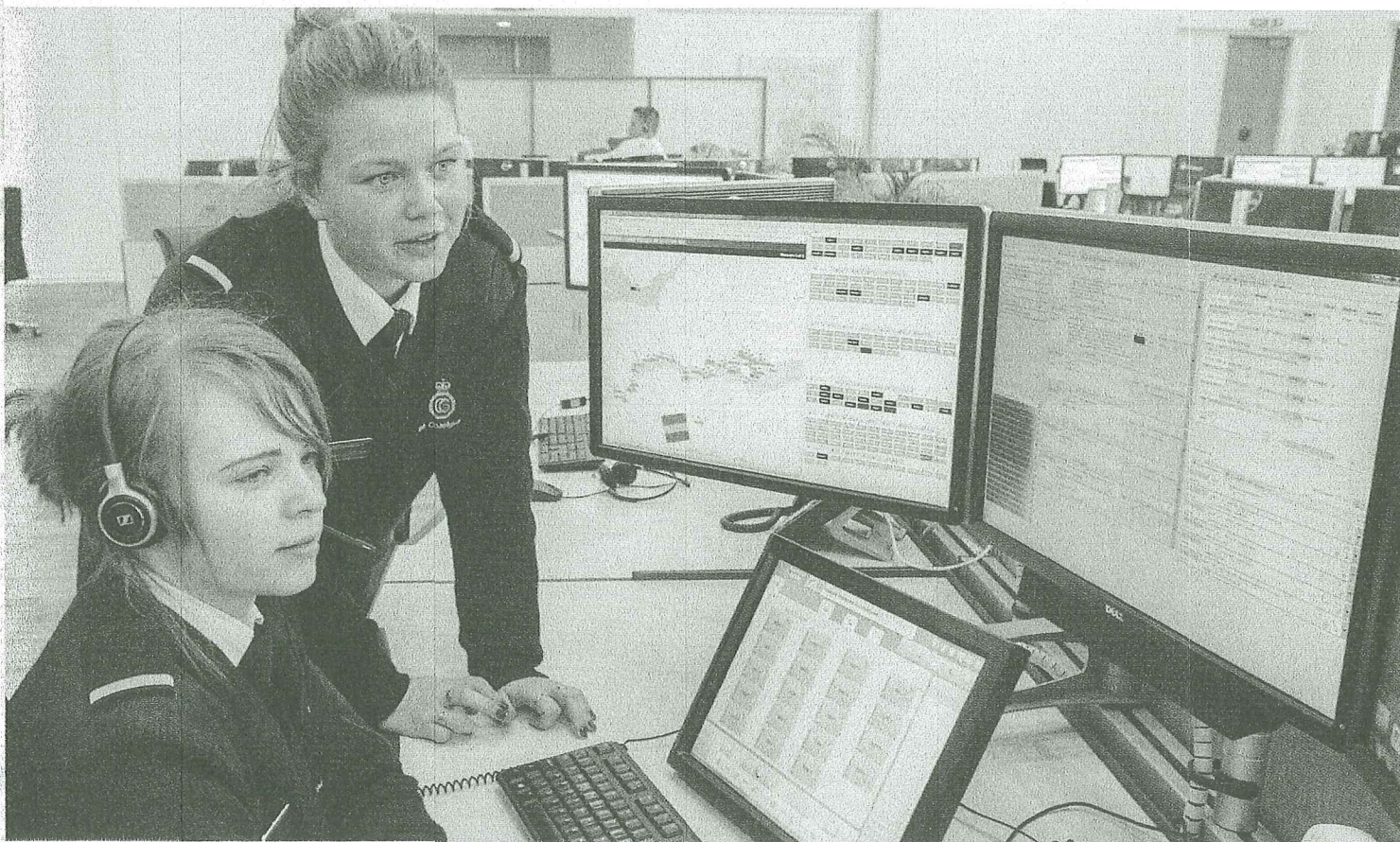
Different types of PLBs have different features. HM Coastguard recommends purchasing a PLB with built in GPS which alerts the Coastguard to your position. A PLB without GPS will still alert HM Coastguard that the user is in distress but will not tell us where the distress location is being triggered. When you register your PLB here: [www.gov.uk/maritime-safety-weather-and-navigation/register-406-mhz-beacons](http://www.gov.uk/maritime-safety-weather-and-navigation/register-406-mhz-beacons) we have all the information we need about you right at hand.

This could save the Coastguard valuable time and allows us to quickly task the most appropriate search and rescue asset to your assistance.

The cost of a PLB is relatively inexpensive now and for as little as £120 you can make a massive investment to your ongoing safety whilst afloat and put your family's mind at peace.

## Check the weather and tide conditions

This seems an obvious action that any paddleboarder would take before going out for the day, but it is so important to check the outlook ahead. Often the sea can be your friend when you set off for the day but a sudden change in weather can happen very quickly. A check of the forecast for the





following 24 hours will allow you to determine if the weather is going to change significantly so that you can alter your plans accordingly. Listen to local knowledge and research your area online because certain areas might have specific risks that could be affected by the tides and direction of drift. Make sure you're aware of the risks before setting off on your journey.

Dress accordingly for the weather. A wetsuit will keep your body temperature better protected for any sudden changes in the weather. You can easily check the tide and weather conditions here: [easytide.ukho.gov.uk](http://easytide.ukho.gov.uk)

### Know your limits

Wherever possible, try and paddleboard with others. If you're a beginner, never hire a paddleboard without being given instruction or a lesson from an approved or qualified instructor.

Always wear a leash to prevent you from losing your board. If you get into trouble never abandon your board – it will keep you afloat. Wave your hand and shout for help.

Assess the conditions and make sure that you are not paddleboarding in conditions that are beyond your capabilities. In the same vein, don't try and be over-ambitious in achieving long distances – make sure you build up your capability slowly.

### Shoreside contacts and SafeTrx

Try and paddle with a friend wherever possible. That way, if you get into difficulty then someone else can raise the alarm. Just as important is having a shoreside contact. Before you set off tell someone where you are going and what time you'll be back. Whilst you won't always be able to give people an accurate time of your return, having someone at home who can raise the alarm plays an important role in keeping you safe. To ensure you can be located as quickly as possible it is worth downloading one of several apps on the market where friends and family can see your location in real time.

The Coastguard recommends the RYA SafeTrx app <https://www.rya.org.uk/knowledge-advice/safe-boating/keep-in-touch/Pages/safetrx.aspx>, which is a FREE tracking smartphone application that monitors your journey and alerts your emergency contacts should you fail to arrive on time. The app allows you to directly contact HM Coastguard in the event of an emergency and could potentially cut vital minutes off the time taken to pinpoint your location. Signing up to SafeTrx will give HM Coastguard the information that they need – including a description of your equipment, shore contact details, and other relevant information – to get you an even swifter response in an emergency. Don't forget, you can also sign up by using the registration only option available online: [www.rya.org.uk/go/safetrx](http://www.rya.org.uk/go/safetrx). **Remember, if you need to speak to us, call 999 and ask for the Coastguard.**

