



water safety
Scotland



Water Safety Signage Guidance

2024

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Background	2
3. Benefits of consistent water safety signage	3
4. Types of signage	3
5. Core water safety sign	4
6. PRE sign	7
7. Sizing and fonts	8
8. Conclusion	9

This document was written by Carlene McAvoy (RoSPA), Emma Dudley (RoSPA) and James Sullivan (SFRS).

1. Introduction

On average, there are 96 water-related fatalities every year in Scotland. 50 of these are accidental meaning that the average accidental fatality rate in Scotland is 0.93 per 100,000 population. This rate is disproportionately high in comparison to other countries within the UK.

Water Safety Scotland (WSS) works to prevent water-related fatalities through the implementation of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy¹ and the Minister's Action Plan². As part of this, there is a key focus on water safety signage which can alert the public to the dangers of water in known high-risk areas. A report on the consistency of water safety signage was completed in 2022 by WSS partners³ and a subsequent project to study public perceptions and understandings of signage was completed in early 2024⁴.

This guidance document has been written with one key objective: to provide a step-by-step guide for landowners and managers to create consistent and easy to understand water safety signage.

This is a guidance document only. Areas may create and utilise their own water safety signage should they wish. This could, however, result in inconsistencies across areas and undermine the benefits of one national water safety signage format.

Whilst using this guidance document, we also recommend use of ISO 7010 – Graphical symbols – Safety colours and safety signs – Registered safety signs.



2. Background

WSS works to prevent water-related fatalities through the implementation of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy (SDPS) which has two overall targets:

- reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk among the highest-risk populations, groups and communities.
- contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

An audit completed by WSS found that water safety signage across Scotland is far from uniform and lacks clarity and consistency which could undermine their preventative effort³.

To help overcome this, WSS, The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) completed research to:

- gain consensus on what signage in Scotland should look like and what information it should include
- test the agreed water safety signage with members of the public to ascertain their understanding of the signs and their awareness of specific aspects of the sign.

The research was able to reach expert consensus on several aspects and necessary components of the signs. Additionally, the results of the research showed that the proposed new signage is clear and understandable to members of the public. Participants demonstrated a high level of understanding of the component parts of the sign such as hazard identification, the Unique Location Code and what to do in an emergency⁴.

3. Benefits of consistent water safety signage

Having one consistent format of water safety signage across Scotland could have the following benefits:

- an easy followed image that allows the public to understand hazards and what to do in an emergency.
- the public will be aware of and able to understand the signs anywhere in Scotland. This is beneficial for both locals and tourists.

4. Types of signage

Two types of signage are recommended:

- Core water safety signs
- Public Rescue Equipment (PRE) signs

A Core water safety sign is the suggested asset for use for any water safety sign.

A PRE sign is a specific sign that should be used where PRE provision is provided.

5. Core water safety sign

This section details the components of the Core water safety sign. Examples can be found below for both Inland and Coastal signs.

Inland



! Water hazards are present here !  ALLOY RANGER SERVICE



BEWARE - SAILING AREA



BEWARE - COLD WATER



LEARN THE WATER SAFETY CODE

Children must be supervised at all times

In an emergency, call 999, ask for Police and quote

Location code: S20-95S
Alloy Park – North West
OS Grid Ref: NN166 712

Coastal



! Water hazards are present here !  ALLOY BEACH SERVICE



BEWARE - SAILING AREA



BEWARE - COLD WATER



LEARN THE WATER SAFETY CODE

Children must be supervised at all times

In an emergency, call 999, ask for Coastguard and quote

Location code: S35-90S
Sanders Cave
OS Grid Ref: NR637 206

The sign should be structured into different component parts: hazard identification, mandatory information, and emergency information.



Hazard identification

Hazard identification should always be yellow and follow the icons presented in ISO 7010. The yellow icon should also have the words placed alongside e.g. 'BEWARE – COLD WATER'



Mandatory information

Mandatory information provides actions and rules that must be adhered to. This may be, for example, 'Children must be supervised at all times'. Mandatory information should be on a blue background.

Emergency information

Emergency information tells the member of the public who to contact in case of an emergency and how to do so. This information should be on a green background.

The sign should state “In an emergency, call 999, ask for [agency] and quote”

The Coordinating Agency that should be noted is as follows:

Police Scotland – All Inland locations (except Loch Ness, Loch Oich, Loch Lochy, and the Upper River Clyde).

HMCG – All Coastal locations and Loch Ness, Loch Oich, Loch Lochy, and the Upper River Clyde.

It is also possible to simply state “In an emergency, call 999 and quote”

Signs should have three location codes: a Unique Location Code (ULC), a location name and an OS Grid reference.

A ULC is a consistent format of location code that can be used on water safety assets such as signs, PRE stations, and other fixed installations. One national ULC format helps to promote consistency and ensure one format for embedment into emergency service control room systems. A separate guidance document on how to create a ULC can be accessed via the Water Safety Scotland website [here](#).

Prohibition icons

Red prohibition symbols (as detailed in ISO 7010) can also be used where required.



Other information

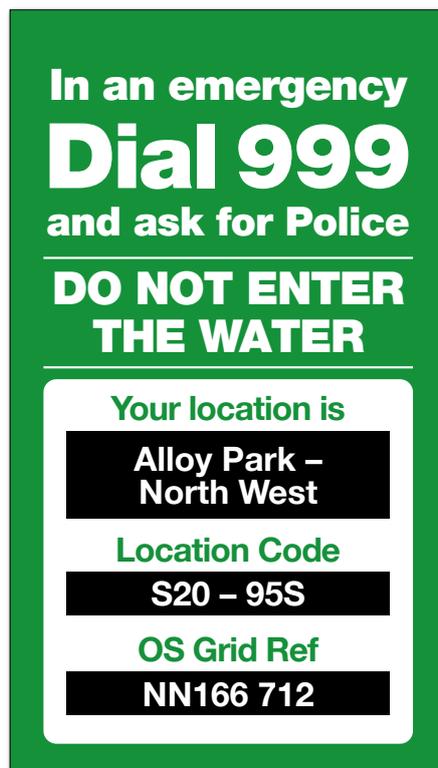
A QR code to WSS's Water Safety Code is also recommended. This should be created in such a way as to not distort the key advice and warning signs.

No other additional information is suggested in order to ensure the sign is clear and straightforward.

Signs should also limit organisation logos to one main organisation. Adding additional agency logos may confuse the message of who to call in an emergency and delay response.

6. PRE sign

A specific sign can be used on PRE stations and equipment and should follow the same structure as the emergency information in a core water safety sign e.g. a green sign with clear instructions and a location name, ULC and OS Grid Reference.



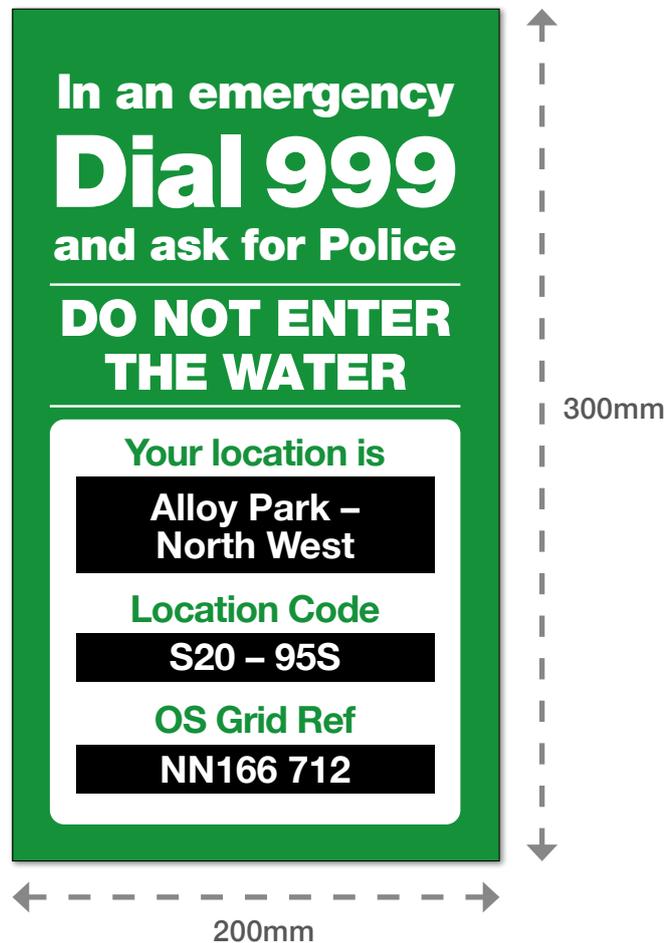
7. Sizing and fonts

The following font is recommended: **Helvetica**

Core water safety sign: it is recommend that the core water safety sign should be no smaller than 500mm x 300mm and is printed in landscape orientation.



PRE sign: it is recommended that the PRE sign should be no smaller than 200mm x 300mm and is printed in portrait orientation.



8. Conclusion

WSS advocates a consistent standard of signage to improve public awareness of water risks as well as to provide clear instructions on what to do in an emergency.

This combination of preventative messaging and safe actions to take in an emergency has the potential to improve public safety in and around Scotland's waters. This supports the aims of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy and the Minister's Action Plan.

References

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- 5 Water Safety Scotland, 2024. Unique Location Codes – Guidance for Scotland. WATER SAFETY SCOTLAND. [viewed 22 April 2024]. Available from: www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/media/xkxp5ncr/ulc-guidance-2024.pdf

