

The RNLI today



Photo: Tony Bartholomew

Lifeboats in action

Frightened, exhausted, in a battered yacht being tossed about by high seas, a sailor makes a desperate mayday call.

Days later, he and his crew will think about how they survived their ordeal.

They will remember the glimpse of an orange and blue lifeboat; her crew members risking their lives amid huge waves to leap aboard.

They will remember being taken to the safety of the lifeboat and the feeling of relief that washed over them.

And they will know that those RNLI volunteers saved their life.



The Royal National Lifeboat Institution is a registered charity that saves lives at sea. It provides the 24-hour on-call service to cover search and rescue requirements out to 100 nautical miles from the coast of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland and a seasonal beach lifeguard service on appropriate beaches in the south west of England. The RNLI is independent from Government and continues to rely on voluntary contributions and legacies for its income.

History and heritage

The RNLI has a long and proud history. Since it was founded in 1824, as the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck, there have been countless examples of courage, selflessness and dedication – qualities still shown by the volunteer crew members, shore helpers and fundraisers of the RNLI today. In 1891, the RNLI became the first charity to organise a street collection, marking the beginning of a strong fundraising tradition.

Lifeboat services in 2004

Launches
7,656

an average of more than 21 a day

Lives saved
433

an average of more than one a day

Total people rescued
7,507

an average of 21 a day

Since the RNLI was founded in 1824, its lifeboats have saved more than 137,000 lives.

More and more people are using the sea for leisure and RNLI crews are responding to an increased number of incidents relating to people engaged in recreational pursuits.

In 2004, 52% of launches were to leisure craft users, 27% to people not using any kind of craft, 13% to merchant or fishing vessels and 8% to other sea users.

Lifeguard services in 2004

RNLI lifeguards were called to

8,010 incidents

saving
53 lives

and assisting a total of
9,041 people

Vision and values

The purpose of the RNLI is very clear – to save lives at sea. The RNLI has a vision 'to be recognised universally as the most effective, innovative and dependable lifeboat service'. The values below set out how this vision will be achieved.

'In all we do or say, we will:

- recognise the courage, commitment and humanity of our crews
- strive to maintain our volunteer ethos
- harness staff professionalism and expertise in support of our volunteers
- seek the highest standards
- maintain our independence and build the trust of the public
- encourage open and effective communication.'



The volunteer ethos

The RNLI is largely a volunteer organisation. Many thousands of people give their time, their skill and their commitment so that the RNLI can achieve its purpose of saving lives at sea.

It is because of the willingness of RNLI volunteers that such a high proportion of the RNLI's money can be spent on first-class lifeboats and equipment, not on wages. The RNLI sets great store by the voluntary spirit of the whole Institution and would resist any change to this.



Lifeboat crews

There are some 4,800 lifeboat crew members in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, 8% of whom are women. They are mostly volunteers who come from many walks of life within their local communities and will readily exchange leisure, comfort and sleep for cold, wet and fatigue. Crews spend many hours of their own time training to become highly skilled and efficient. Their lifesaving work is essential, often difficult and sometimes dangerous.

The lifeboat fleet

The RNLI has an active fleet of 332 lifeboats at 233 lifeboat stations, which are strategically placed around the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. The lifeboats, ranging in length from 4.9m to 17m, enable the service to reach at least 90% of all casualties within 10 nautical miles of lifeboat stations within 30 minutes of launch in all weathers. RNLI lifeboats on the Thames aim to get to any point on the tidal reaches of the river within 15 minutes of receiving a callout.

Hovercraft

Hovercraft represent a relatively new area of operation for the RNLI in the intertidal areas of mud banks and sand not accessible by conventional lifeboats. The first hovercraft went on station at Morecambe in 2002, the second at Hunstanton in 2003 and the third at Southend-on-Sea in June 2004. Another has been on trial at New Brighton.

Lifeboat station support

Volunteer shore helpers assist with the launch and recovery of the lifeboat – sometimes being appointed to specific jobs, such as head launcher or tractor driver, depending on the way the lifeboat is launched. They form a vital part of the rescue team.

Each station is supported by a voluntary lifeboat management group. The lifeboat operations manager (LOM) has responsibility for authorising the launch of the lifeboat and the day-to-day management of the station.

Beach Lifeguards

The RNLI employs approximately 300 seasonal lifeguards and also has about 50 volunteer lifeguards at lifeguard units within the RNLI's south division.

The beach lifeguard service operates a fleet of inshore rescue boats, rescue water craft and four-wheel drive vehicles. Each lifeguard unit is equipped with rescue boards, rescue tubes, first aid kits, defibrillators and various other items of essential lifesaving equipment.



Beach safety

The beach safety programme aims to save lives through educating beach users and raising safety awareness. Preventing accidents before they happen is 90% of a lifeguard's job. The RNLI also encourages beach users to read beach safety signs and to think about the tides. With the increase of sports such as kite surfing, the RNLI is now delivering safety messages to this group of people as well.

Sea Safety

The RNLI Sea Safety team aims to save lives by changing attitudes and behaviour among people who use the sea, particularly targeting the leisure boat community and commercial fishermen. Statistics are used to target those most at risk and to prioritise the work of the department.

Safety messages and advice are delivered by teams of volunteers in various ways, such as presentations and demonstrations of safety equipment to clubs, roadshows at events and through a boat safety advisory scheme called SEA Check.



Education

The RNLI is educating children and young people about the work of the Institution, how they can help and how to stay safe on or by the sea. Regional education officers work with teams of volunteers to run a variety of educational initiatives. Raising awareness, particularly among young people, is vital, as they will be the crews, fundraisers and supporters of the future.



Training

It is essential that the RNLI offers the best training it can, especially to those who volunteer to risk their lives to save others. In 2002, the RNLI introduced a Crew Competency Framework, providing crew members with externally accredited courses and qualifications. This approach was recognised in 2003 when the RNLI received a National Training Award. These high standards are being maintained and developed with the help of The Lifeboat College, which opened in July 2004. It includes accommodation, classrooms, distance learning resources and a Survival Centre with a wave tank, full bridge simulator, live engine workshop and firefighting simulator.

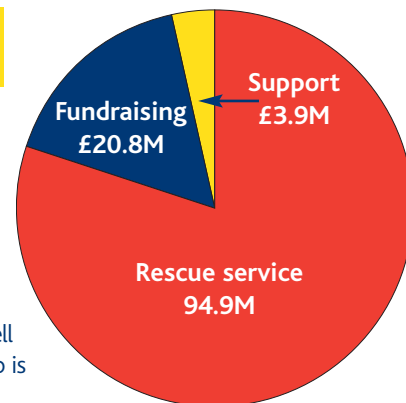
Raising awareness

Making the public aware of what the RNLI does, its history, its achievements and its plans for the future is essential if the charity is to continue to meet its operational and funding requirements through voluntary donations.

The press office at headquarters, along with the divisional media relations managers and lifeboat press officers around the coast ensure that, through the media, the public is made aware of the work of volunteer crews and fundraisers and specialist staff. Dramatic rescues, human interest stories, technical advances and the Institution's rich history allow them to show the public why they should continue to support the RNLI.

Running costs

In 2004 it cost approximately £119M to run the RNLI (around £325,000 per day). For every £1 spent, around 80p is spent on the rescue service itself, which includes the cost of the crew, the boats and the station properties as well as sea safety and education, 17p is used for fundraising and 3p for support. Any surplus of income over expenditure is held in the RNLI's reserve fund and used to guarantee the RNLI's boat building programme and other capital projects.



Lifeboat costs

Inshore lifeboats

D class (IB1), fully inflatable	£25,000
B class (Atlantic 85 soon to replace Atlantic 75), RIB	£125,000
Hovercraft	£135,000
Arancia rescue boat with trailer	£8,000
Rescue water craft	£6,500

All weather lifeboats

Trent class, 14m long	£1.2M
Built 1994–2003	
Severn class, 17m long	£2M
Built 1995–2004	

The new Tamar class lifeboat is likely to cost around £2M. The first Tamar is due on service in the second half of 2005.



Equipment costs

These are the average costs of the main items of kit used by lifeboat crews and lifeguards.

Lifeguard kit

Shirt	£10
Shorts	£15
Jacket	£35
Binoculars	£50
Full wetsuit	£90
Helmet	£125

All weather lifeboat crew kit

Gloves	£20
Boots	£40
Trousers	£205
Jacket	£235
Safety helmet	£180
Lifejacket	£500

Inshore lifeboat crew kit

Gloves	£20
Drysuit (boots included)	£350
Thermal suit	£90
Safety helmet	£180
Lifejacket	£460



Raising the funds

Fundraising is vital to the RNLI. Its independence from Government and the admiration that people have for the crews and lifeguards help motivate them to support the lifeboat service.

The RNLI has approximately 1,100 fundraising branches and guilds throughout the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, grouped into nine regions. Their support allows the Institution to call on thousands of people from all walks of life, who raise money to help the RNLI save lives at sea. Branch members and non-members alike get involved in all sorts of activities to boost funds.

Funds are also raised by people generously leaving gifts to the RNLI in their wills. In 2004, legacies accounted for 66% of the the RNLI's fundraised income.



How to help

You can help the RNLI in a variety of ways. There are three adult grades of membership: Shoreline, Offshore and Governor, plus Storm Force, a membership club for children. As well as joining, you can also give a regular or one-off donation, make the RNLI your chosen charity when you take part in a sponsored event, or remember the RNLI when you write your will.

You may want to get involved in fundraising activities – why not contact your regional office or RNLI headquarters and find out more?



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Contact us

Royal National Lifeboat Institution,
West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HZ

Telephone: 0845 122 6999

Fax: 0845 126 1999

www.rnli.org.uk email: info@rnli.org.uk

Regional offices

Scotland

RNLI, Unit 3, Ruthvenfield Grove
Inveralmond Industrial Estate
Perth, PH1 3GL

Tel: 01738 642999

Email: scotland@rnli.org.uk

Eastern

RNLI, Magdalen Road, Hadleigh,
Ipswich, Suffolk, IP7 5AD

Tel: 01473 822837

Email: eastern@rnli.org.uk

Greater London

RNLI, 20 Buckingham Street,
London, WC2N 6EF

Tel: 020 7839 3369

Email: london@rnli.org.uk

South East

RNLI, Kennet House,
River Way, Uckfield, Sussex, TN22 1SL

Tel: 01825 761466

Email: southeast@rnli.org.uk

South West

RNLI, Unit A, Longacre, Saltash,
Cornwall, PL12 6LZ

Tel: 01752 850680

Email: southwest@rnli.org.uk

Wales and West Mercia

RNLI, 9 Drake Walk, Brigantine Place
Cardiff, CF10 4AN

Tel: 029 2045 6999

Email: wales@rnli.org.uk

North

RNLI, 18 Half Edge Lane, Eccles,
Manchester, M30 9GJ

Tel: 0161 787 8779

Email: north@rnli.org.uk

Republic of Ireland

RNLI, 15 Windsor Terrace
Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin

Tel: 00 353 1 284 5050

Email: lifeboatsireland@rnli.org.uk

Northern Ireland

RNLI, Unit 1, Lesley Office Park,
393 Holywood Road, Belfast, BT4 2LS

Tel: 028 9047 3665

Email: northernireland@rnli.org.uk

This factsheet is one of a series. For more information contact one of the offices listed.