



IRISH WATER SAFETY

CUMANN SÁBHÁILTEACHT UISCE

BEACH SAFETY REPORT 2001

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction and Background	4
The Legislative Position	7
Role and functions of Water Safety Development Officers in Local Authorities	10
Bathing Locations – Safe or Dangerous	12
Identification of Dangerous Beaches and Bathing Places	13
Zoning	16
Lifeguards.....	17
Publicity	20
Safety Signs.....	22
Ring buoys.....	23
Emergency Services	25
Appendix I.....	26
Appendix II.....	27

REPORT ON BEACH SAFETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Arising from a request from Mr Robert Molloy T.D., Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, Irish Water Safety has prepared a report on beach safety. The Report owes a substantial debt to work undertaken by a Review Group appointed previously to examine and report on beach safety generally. For the purposes of this Report, recommendations are described as being made by the Review Group, even where these were refined by Irish Water Safety subsequently.
2. The Review Group received submissions from area water safety committees, water safety examiners and local authority water safety development officers. The Group was assisted by two sub-groups, which were composed of water safety development officers in the case of the first group, and water safety examiners in the other. Sincere thanks are due to all those who assisted with this work.
3. The recommendations of the Review Group are directed principally at local authorities, but the involvement of other bodies and organisations is critical to beach safety and other of the Group's recommendations reflect this.
4. The principal recommendations of the Review Group are summarised as follows:

Legislative Position

- Local authorities should introduce, in respect of major bathing places, bye-laws for public safety and the good management of the area.

- Persons who damage lifesaving equipment should, where possible, be prosecuted.
- The use of jet skis and other fast power craft should be regulated in accordance with the initiative taken by the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources.

Water Safety Development Officers

- Local authorities should appoint Water Safety Development Officers who should be properly resourced. Vacancies should be filled quickly.
- These officers should arrange regular and recorded inspections of lifesaving equipment.

Dangerous Beaches

- Known dangerous beaches should be clearly sign-posted as such by local authorities but beaches should not be designated as safe.

Identification of Dangerous Beaches

- Local authorities should identify dangerous beaches by virtue of beach risk assessments, and these should be carried out on a planned basis at least every five years.
- Normally, examiners appointed by Irish Water Safety should carry out these risk assessments.
- Irish Water Safety may initiate and carry out inspections of beaches in the public interest, and convey the findings to the appropriate authorities

Zoning

- Bathing areas in major resorts should be zoned and supervised by lifeguards

Lifeguards

- Local authorities should not employ lifeguards on dangerous beaches
- The period during which lifeguards should be employed should be extended to include June, and should continue into September in fine weather.
- All local authorities should sign an agreement with the Irish Coast Guard designating the lifeguard service as a “declared facility”.
- Lifeguards should be appropriately qualified, and should be provided with standard uniform and equipment

Other Recommendations

- Hazards relating to water safety should be communicated to the public by local authorities.
- Adequate resources should be available to Irish Water Safety for raising awareness of water safety
- Common signage of dangerous beaches should be put in place by local authorities
- The 18” ring buoy should continue in use.
- Safety plans for bathing places should be drawn up by local authorities and co-ordinated with the emergency plans generally.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 In August 1998, Mr Robert Molloy T.D., Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, asked the National Safety Council to prepare a report on beach safety. This request was made against a background of the tragic drowning of three young people at Strandhill, County Sligo.

1.2 The composition of the Group that prepared the report was as follows:

Donal O’Sullivan (Chair)	Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance
Donal Connolly	Manager, Waterford County Council
John McNally MCC	Member of NSC Water Safety Committee
Frank Nolan	Senior Vice President – International Life
G.Kt.Odr.L.S.	Saving (Europe)
James O’Leary	Water Safety Development Officer, Wexford County Council

Donal O’Sullivan and Frank Nolan were serving members of the National Safety Council.

1.3 The Review Group met four times. Written submissions were requested from:

- Chairpersons of Area Water Safety Committees
- Water Safety Examiners
- Local Authority Water Safety Development Officers

A total of nineteen written submissions were received. The Review Group wishes to extend its sincere thanks to all the persons from whom submissions were received.

1.4 Two sub groups were established to assist the Review Group:

- Local Authority Water Safety Development Officer sub group to examine the role of coastal local authorities; and
- A Specialist Water Safety sub group to examine the role of the National Safety Council (Water Safety Ireland);

The membership of these sub groups is set out at Appendix I.

- 1.5 The Review Group reported in May 1999. The Department of the Environment drew upon the Report ***Recommendations of the Review Group on Beach Safety in Ireland*** as the basis for a circular letter conveying a series of recommendations to local authorities in June of that year. At the same time, the Minister decided that some of the recommendations of the Report required further study, and the Report was referred to the Irish Water Safety Association (or as it is generally known, **Irish Water Safety**) – established in November 1999– to update and refine it.
- 1.6 The Council of Irish Water Safety, in responding to the Minister’s request, asked Mr Donal O’Sullivan to assist in this work, along with Mr Frank Nolan, Chairman of Irish Water Safety and Mr Ian Keating who is a member of the Council. The Council took the view that the updating and expansion of the earlier report should be consolidated into a new report. This document represents the outcome of this work, and constitutes the new Report. For ease of reference, recommendations are referred to as being made by the Review Group, irrespective of whether these were embraced by the initial Report, or as refined subsequently.
- 1.7 The terms of reference required the Group to examine the role and functions of Irish Water Safety (formerly the National Safety Council) and local authorities, with reference to such matters as safety risk

assessments, lifeguards, signage, safety equipment, zoning and publicity.

- 1.8 “Water Safety” is a term which can encompass a multitude. In particular, it can be applied to safety on, as well as in, the water. As a general rule, safety afloat – whether in boats or other craft – is not the subject of this report which is focussed on safety in the water in the context of swimming and bathing as forms of recreation and leisure. Reference is, however, made to other types of recreational use of our seas and inland waters where this is relevant to swimming.
- 1.9 It is recognised that the recommendations in this Report will be of value only to the extent that the organisations responsible for their implementation are in a position to do so. Resource availability will, as usual, play a central part in this. All the bodies to whom recommendations are addressed are urged to take all practicable steps to ensure that the necessary resources to implement the recommendations of the Report are made available.
- 1.10 Typically, reference is made in the Report to beaches. Where this is the case, the term “beaches” should be interpreted to encompass bathing places generally.

2. The Legislative Position

- 2.1 The promotion of water safety, in its broadest sense, is a function shared by a number of different agencies, including Government Departments, local authorities and non-commercial semi-state bodies. This notwithstanding, it is clear that the principal focus on promoting swimming and lifesaving, and safety in the context of swimming, rests squarely with the statutory body “Irish Water Safety”.
- 2.2 This body was established in 1999 by statutory instrument under the enabling powers available in the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act, 1971. The statutory instrument is *entitled The Irish Water Safety Association (Establishment) Order, 1999*. The statutory powers accorded to Irish Water Safety are reasonably broad, and seem adequate for the purposes for which they were intended. Irish Water Safety provides instruction in swimming and lifesaving as well as promoting awareness of water safety generally. The organisation works under the *aegis* of the Department of the Environment and Local Government.
- 2.3 Local authorities are also granted powers in relation to a range of amenity and recreation functions under Part V of the Local Government Act, 1994. Section 31(2) of that Act enables local authorities, *inter alia*, to provide facilities and services related to the promotion of public safety, including water safety. The enabling powers available under this Act appear adequate to allow local authorities to discharge their traditional role in relation to water safety at local government level. Usually, the services provided by local authorities include the provision of lifeguards, water safety equipment (such as ring buoys and other equipment/appliances), swimming and bathing places for the public and the arranging of instruction in swimming and lifesaving (or assisting in this).

- 2.4 Local authorities also have powers to make bye-laws under the Local Government Act, 1994. The powers available to local authorities under the 1994 Act are cast in very broad terms, and can be used to regulate and manage bathing and bathing places. While the enabling powers to make bye-laws in relation to these and related matters seem satisfactory, not all local authorities have made use of them in relation to the management and control of bathing areas. It is recommended that local authorities review the arrangements in place in respect of bathing places in their areas with a view to introducing bye-laws for the more important bathing places used and frequented by the public.
- 2.5 Irish Water Safety is aware that under the Malicious Damage Act 1991, significant penalties are available to the Courts where malicious damage to property is proved. Similarly, if lifesaving equipment is stolen it can be dealt with by due process of law. Damage to lifesaving equipment is to be abhorred; it is not putting it too strongly to say that anyone who damages lifesaving equipment shows a callous disregard for human life. Against this background, local authorities are encouraged to instigate proceedings against any person where evidence is available that he/she was responsible for causing such damage or theft.
- 2.6 Usually, bye-laws might deal with regulating the use of bathing places in accordance with the assessment made by the local authority or its lifeguards of the appropriateness of bathing in the context of prevailing weather conditions (as indicated by the standard flags etc.). Other issues, which might be addressed, include zoning, exclusion areas for uses other than bathing, public order considerations and general management issues such as access and trading.
- 2.7 The Review Group is aware of the steps being taken by the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources to introduce controls

over the operation of jet-skis and other fast powerboats. This action seems necessary in the light of the shortcomings of existing legislation relevant to these craft, which can present a serious danger to bathers. The general approach being adopted involves the introduction of controls at central level over the craft themselves and those who operate them, with power for local authorities to regulate the use (when and where, for example) of such craft locally. This seems a sensible basis on which to proceed. The Review Group would welcome a situation where the enabling powers available to the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources, and other parties such as local authorities, are availed of as soon as possible in the interests of promoting water safety.

3. Role and Functions of Water Safety Development Officers in Local Authorities

- 3.1 Water Safety Development Officers have made a positive contribution to water safety in Ireland. Their responsibilities are outlined in Appendix II. All local authorities should appoint Water Safety Development Officers and vacancies should be filled with a minimum of delay. The Review Group has concerns that certain local authorities have not appointed a Water Safety Development Officer, or have failed to fill vacancies over relatively long periods.
- 3.2 The duties of Water Safety Development Officers have been clearly defined, and have been endorsed by the Water Safety Development Officers own Association. In the view of the Review Group, it can happen that, in certain instances, some of their duties and responsibilities do not receive adequate attention due to limited resources, both in terms of money and time.
- 3.3 The effectiveness of local authorities in making an impact on water safety - including contributing effectively to reduced incidence of accidental drowning – depends in large part on availability of resources. Water Safety Development Officers must be proactive in the promotion of water safety. While local authorities do make real efforts to provide resources to their Water Safety Development Officers, the resource levels have not always been adequate. Irish Water Safety exhorts local authorities to give greater priority to water safety when decisions about resource allocation are being taken.
- 3.4 Water Safety Development Officers should ensure - either personally or by delegation - that all lifesaving equipment is in place and in working order at locations where the local authority has provided it.

The inspection of lifesaving equipment, including signs, ring buoys, and lighting on piers, should be carried out at intervals of two weeks throughout the year. Equipment at popular resorts may require more frequent inspections during summer months. It is desirable that a register of inspections be maintained by the responsible person, setting out the date and time of the inspection, the condition of the equipment and any necessary action taken.

- 3.5 A key role of the Water Safety Development Officer is the identification of safety measures to be implemented for specific locations – both those which are used for bathing and those where bathing is either inadvisable or prohibited outright. In identifying these measures it would be expected that a risk assessment of the area should be arranged by the Water Safety Development Officer.
- 3.6 In the past, such risk assessments have been carried out by members of Water Safety Ireland (National Safety Council) on a voluntary basis. At present, risk assessments are carried out by Irish Water Safety. Risk assessments of all areas should be carried out at least once every five years or following any incident where a significant threat to the safety of bathers arose. A planned programme of risk assessments will assist in ensuring that beaches the necessary risk assessments are carried out at regular intervals, and it is recommended that such programmes be now implemented

4. **Bathing Locations – Safe or Dangerous?**

- 4.1 It is clear that certain beaches present risks to bathers of a far higher order than other beaches; this conclusion will be evident from a study of the history of accidental drowning at such beaches, irrespective of any analysis of the underlying factors which give rise to their dangerous nature. It is the strong view of the Review Group that beaches which are dangerous – either because of a history of accidents or because dangerous currents, rip-tides etc. occur – should be acknowledged as such and clearly sign-posted. Any lesser action would do a serious disservice to public safety. The possibility that the sign-posting of individual beaches as dangerous might infer to some people that all other beaches are safe is considered remote; it is certainly not a sufficient argument to refrain from sign-posting dangerous beaches.
- 4.2 The Review Group is conscious that certain local interests tend to oppose any action that involves classification of a beach as dangerous. Notwithstanding, the safety of the public must be paramount in any decision regarding the classification of a beach as dangerous for swimming.
- 4.3 It is accepted that beaches should not be classified as safe. However, the Review Group recognise the value of the “Blue Flag” scheme, which is operated to designate beaches that have particular amenities available for the benefit of the public. Any beach or bathing place can be “dangerous” due to bad weather, or in the light of the competence, fitness and general well being of the person using it. As stated in paragraph 4.1, this is not a sufficient reason for declining to classify a beach as dangerous where there are good reasons for doing so.

5. **Identification of Dangerous Beaches and Bathing Places**

- 5.1 The Review Group considers that local authorities should have all swimming or bathing places frequented by the public or used for aquatic purposes assessed for risk:
- at least once every five years; or
 - following a serious incident involving actual loss of life or the potential for drowning.

A planned programme of risk assessments will assist in ensuring that beaches and bathing places at regular intervals. Such programmes should now be implemented with priority accorded to places presenting higher risk levels.

- 5.2 It is accepted that many local authorities may not have the necessary expertise to carry out a thorough beach risk assessment. The practice has been that Water Safety Ireland – either as a committee of the National Safety Council or since its establishment as an independent statutory body - through their voluntary water safety examiners have assisted local authorities in carrying out risk assessments on request. The Review Group considers that Irish Water Safety should continue to assist local authorities by carrying out risk assessments of beaches and bathing places.

- 5.3 The Review Group is unaware of any other organisation offering a similar voluntary service. However, it acknowledges that it is the prerogative of each local authority to employ professional risk assessors if it so desires or if an alternative opinion is required.

- 5.4 An examination of risk assessments previously carried out for local authorities indicates that recommendations arising from risk assessments were not always acted upon. Recommendations are

made to protect the public in or near water, and in general their implementation should not involve major expenditure. For the future, the Review Group urges local authorities to implement the recommendations of beach risk assessments on a planned basis and within a reasonable period of time. If it is found, for whatever reason, that it is not feasible to implement risk assessment recommendations, then these should be referred back to the risk assessor for a review so that refined recommendations are arrived at which can be implemented on a practical basis.

5.5 The Examiners of Irish Water Safety, when requested to carry out risk assessments for local authorities, should be supplied with all necessary documentation and maps of the location. It is highly desirable that the Water Safety Development Officer, or a nominated local authority professional/technical officer, accompanies the risk assessor to assist in providing local knowledge. However, the final recommendations are a matter solely for the risk assessor whose independence must be respected. The risk assessor may also request the assistance of additional expertise e.g. a photographer.

5.6 Other recommendations in relation to beach risk assessments are as follows:

- All risk assessment requests should be directed to the Chief Executive of Irish Water Safety. The approved risk assessment report should be issued with the minimum of delay after the date of the risk assessment.
- The training programme originally drawn up by Water Safety Ireland, for potential risk assessors should continue and qualified risk assessors should undertake refresher courses at least once every five years.

- Where it considers it necessary, Irish Water Safety may itself may undertake a risk assessment in the interests of public safety and bring its findings to the notice of the appropriate authorities.
- Other statutory bodies may request Irish Water Safety to undertake water safety risk assessments, and they should continue to be facilitated in this. These include Government Departments and other statutory bodies.

6. **Zoning**

- 6.1 The present practice in this country is that bathing areas are not zoned, and this is at odds with the practice in other countries, including those in Europe. The increase in all types of aquatic sports on Irish waters has brought with it dangers for bathers from water skiers, wind surfers, board surfers, jet boat enthusiasts and fast power boat users.
- 6.2 The Review Group believe that, with good management and a sense of responsibility on the part of all users of our seas and inland waters, different aquatic recreations can be accommodated. Nevertheless, there is a real sense that users of the above crafts have encroached upon the traditional waters available to bathers, and that new dangers exist where aquatic resources are shared for different purposes.
- 6.3 The Review Group is aware of the initiative being taken by the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources relevant to jet-skis and other fast craft, and this should lead to the introduction of zoning at specific locations in respect of these craft. Either way, the Group consider that zoning of bathing areas, particularly in the major resorts, should be implemented as soon as possible by local authorities.
- 6.4 Zoned bathing areas should be supervised by lifeguards. The zoned bathing area should be marked on either side by red and white marker buoys from the shore to a defined distance into the sea. In determining the defined distance, account has to be taken of the tidal range and topography of the area to be zoned.

7. Lifeguards

- 7.1 One of the best safeguards against drowning accidents at bathing places is the presence of trained and competent lifeguards. In Ireland, the primary function of a lifeguard has traditionally been recognised as the prevention of bathing accidents. Therefore, placing lifeguards on known dangerous bathing areas is likely to lead to an expectation that the area is safe for swimming. Clearly, such areas will not be safe for swimming, irrespective of the presence of lifeguards. Bathing in known dangerous locations is to be discouraged at all times. On this basis, the Review Group has concluded that it is unreasonable that lifeguards should be expected to put their lives at risk in attempting rescues on beaches clearly designated and known as dangerous beaches clearly designated and known as dangerous.
- 7.2 In many parts of the world, particularly Australia, surf lifesaving clubs are an integral part of the national water safety organisation of the country. These clubs promote water safety and an awareness of the sea through their sporting and social activities at beach locations. The clubs also provide lifeguards during the summer months. In many of the areas - that are surfing beaches (such as Bondi Beach in Australia and beaches on the south coast of England) - the surfing clubs help their members to become qualified surf lifesavers, competent to attempt rescues in surf conditions. In recent years, Water Safety Ireland through its surf lifesaving competition has involved itself with this form of rescue. It is recommended that the surfing community, in association with Irish Water Safety, consider forming surf lifesaving clubs to promote wider competency in surf lifesaving.
- 7.3 There is no national rate of pay applying to lifeguards. Experience has shown that in order to attract candidates from one location to another, some local authorities pay above the normal rate thus creating

shortages in other areas. This may not be in the best interests of water safety nationally. It is recommended that the Local Government Management Services Board should consider whether a uniform standard rate should apply to the position throughout the country.

- 7.4 Traditionally, lifeguards have been employed for the period 1st July to 31st August, with the exception of a small number of popular beaches where the service commences on the 1 June. This has attracted serious criticism when periods of fine weather occur outside the period 1st July to 31st August. In order to tackle this problem, it is strongly recommended that every effort be made to employ lifeguards on beaches/bathing areas from 1st June until 31st August. If fine weather continues into September the placing of lifeguards should, if possible, continue for the duration of the fine spell.
- 7.5 The tightening labour market, allied to other factors, may at some point result in a situation where there is a scarcity of lifeguards at beaches during the summer. Should this occur, the relevant local authorities and Irish Water Safety should jointly assess the options for dealing with the matter. One option might be to avail of the services of Civil Defense volunteers – who would, of course, need to be properly trained before entering service. The Review Group is aware also that the Royal National Lifeboat Institute has initiated a pilot scheme for the provision of lifeguards to local authorities in the United Kingdom on specific beaches. This model for provision of lifeguards should be borne in mind if the present arrangements for recruitment of lifeguards prove inadequate in Ireland.
- 7.6 All local authorities should sign the agreement “Lifeguards as a declared facility” prepared by the Irish Coast Guard. This agreement offers many advantages, especially in formalising support in relation to Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. It may well save life. The Review Group considers that the agreement enhances the role and

standing of the lifeguard as a declared facility, and strongly urges those local authorities who have yet to sign it to do so without delay.

7.7 The provision of lifeguards on Irish beaches during the summer period is essential. Over the past three years the number of young persons applying for lifeguard positions is decreasing. This shortage of candidates should not be allowed to dilute the required minimum standard necessary to perform lifesaving duties on Irish beaches. However, the lifeguard qualification must be such as to be achievable - but without falling below recognised international standards. In certain circumstances, candidates for employment as lifeguards may, in the opinion of the employing local authority, be required to pass a medical test.

7.8 A lifeguard should at all times wear the standard designated uniform and be supplied with all equipment necessary to function as a lifeguard as required by Irish Water Safety. In special cases where it is the opinion of the Water Safety Development Officer that the lifeguard requires additional equipment to meet the needs of the location, such equipment will be supplied without delay. Details of the standard uniform and equipment are set out in the *Lifeguarding Handbook*.

8. **Publicity**

8.1 Local authorities should take steps to bring to the notice of those who frequent bathing places within their functional areas the basic information necessary to ensure the safe enjoyment of the amenity. There is especially relevant in the context of hazards that might be anticipated at particular bathing places. There is a specific role for the Water Safety Development Officer in ensuring that this function is carried out. Typically, communication of information to the public concerning any bathing areas is undertaken by two means:

- through the local media including local radio and newspapers;
and
- by on-site information boards.

8.2 The information provided should include all relevant facts to promote the safety of persons using the bathing area. Examples include:

- if the area becomes polluted, information should be immediately relayed through the media.
- the advent of rip currents due to a sudden change in the topography of the beach.

8.3 As a statutory body, Irish Water Safety has a responsibility to promote public awareness of advice in relation to water safety. Over the past few years, with the emphasis on partnerships with other sectors, Irish Water Safety (and formerly Water Safety Ireland) has co-operated with several bodies - particularly with the Irish Coast Guard and the Royal National Lifeboat Institute - in the provision of effective educational material. Participation with the Marine Safety Working Group has also resulted in the production of other water safety materials.

8.3 In order to enhance the effectiveness of Irish Water Safety, increased and sustained funding for publicity is considered essential. The

Review Group is aware that Irish Water Safety is making efforts to attract commercial sponsorship but recognises that the Exchequer grant from the Department of the Environment and Local Government is likely to be the mainstay of funding for Irish Water Safety for the short to medium term.

- 8.4 Given the increase in adventure and aquatic sports, young persons should be given adequate guidance in the prevention of drowning accidents, before participating in outdoor water pursuits. The persons responsible for organising the pursuits should undertake this and ensure that safety guidance is given on an individual basis is relevant to the activity to be undertaken.
- 8.5 No swimming event (sponsored or otherwise) should take place without consultation by the organisers with the local authority (as appropriate), the Gardai and other lifesaving organisations. The Irish Coast Guard should always be made aware of such events. These include sponsored swims, Christmas swims, triathlons, long-distance swims and other events especially where the persons involved may not be experienced in water safety.
- 8.6 The Review Group consider that the organisers of such events are responsible – and should acknowledge this responsibility - for making sure that reasonable safety guidelines are in place. Also, in the event of deteriorating weather or otherwise, a safety officer – who should be appointed by the organisers - should have the power to call off or terminate the event. Should this happen, the organisers should inform the emergency services and any other agencies who may have been notified of the event.

9. **Safety Signs**

- 9.1 Despite the introduction by the National Safety Council (Water Safety Ireland) – and subsequently endorsed by Irish Water Safety - of a code of practice for signs for use by local authorities, the use of common signage throughout the country is not evident. The signs include warning signs, regulatory signs and information signs. It is strongly recommended that common signage be put in place by all local authorities, and that any existing non conforming signs be replaced with new ones within two years. Tourists – whether Irish or from abroad - and local people, moving from one beach to another, should see a common signage. They should not be expected to interpret local “makeshift” signs, particularly where the sign indicates that bathing is dangerous.
- 9.2 Locations that are known to be dangerous for bathing or other aquatic sports should be adequately signed to ensure that members of the public visiting the locations are aware of the dangers. The Water Safety Development Officer of each local authority should ensure that the signage is adequate through the implementation of proper monitoring and inspection systems. The Water Safety Development Officer should also maintain a register and record of the location of each sign.

10. Ring buoys

- 10.1 The placement of ring buoys at many locations throughout Ireland has contributed to the saving of lives. The IWSA – an earlier version of the present organisation - introduced a specific colour code for the ring buoy, rope and box to enhance visibility and to reduce vulnerability to theft.
- 10.2 Unlike other countries (with the exception of USA and Canada) the 18” throwing and retrieving ring buoy is the one in used by local authorities around Ireland and not the heavy standard “Board of Trade” type, which is used within certain harbour areas. The 18” ring buoy is compact in design, allowing it to be thrown at the victim in the water, and if missed it can be quickly retrieved and re-thrown. The Review Group consider that this ring buoy should remain in use.
- 10.3 The standard drill for throwing ring buoys forms a primary part of early water safety instruction. This means that very young people who have attended lifesaving classes should be aware of how to use the ring buoy.
- 10.4 Regretfully, there is a high incident of malicious damage and theft to this lifesaving equipment and there is a continuing need for the public to be made aware, in unambiguous terms, that damage or theft of such ring buoys or the attached rope, could result in the loss of life. At present, Irish Water Safety relies mainly on posters to communicate this message.
- 10.5 As mentioned above, ring buoys have played an important role in containing accidental drowning. All agencies that have installed ring buoys at various locations should ensure that they are inspected

frequently, and at a minimum once every fortnight. To assist such inspections each agency should have a register of the locations where the ring buoys are placed. If necessary, consideration should be given to having this work done on a contract basis.

11. Emergency Services

- 11.1 Local authorities should prepare beach and bathing area management plans, and there should be clear procedures as to what action to take in the event of a major accident or emergency. It has to be fully understood that, if particular bathing areas are to be promoted as tourist amenity locations, then there is a responsibility for local authorities and others to have in place adequate safety measures including an emergency action plan.
- 11.2 There is a legitimate expectation on the part of users of amenities that reasonable measures have been taken to ensure appropriate safety, and that some thought has been given to the manner in which an emergency will be responded to. In the case of local authorities, it seems reasonable to expect that the Water Safety Development Officer, in consultation with other officials (fire officer and engineering staff) and other agencies, would have in place an effective plan supplementing the existing major emergency plan.
- 11.3 As already mentioned, the initiative of the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources that involves treating the lifeguard service as a “declared facility” throughout the country, is not only welcomed but is an essential development. It accords fully with the recommendation of the Doherty Review Group on sea rescue.
- 11.4 The Review Group is satisfied that the Irish Coast Guard, which forms part of the Department of Marine and Natural Resources, operates to the highest standards. This is due, in part, to the many agencies, which have “declared facilities” and which are, therefore, available to the Coast Guard to respond in the event of an emergency.

Appendix I

1. Local Authority Water Safety Development Officer Sub Group - established to examine the role of Coastal Local Authorities.

The members were:

James O'Leary (Chairman, Member of the Review Group and County Wexford Water Safety Development Officer)

David Daly (Cork County Council W.S.D.O.)

Michael Fitzgerald (Waterford County Council W.S.D.O.)

Michael Gavin (Mayo County Council W.S.D.O.)

Brendan O'Connor (Kerry County Council W.S.D.O.)

2. A Specialist Water Safety sub group - established to examine the role of the National Safety Council (Water Safety Ireland).

John McNally (Chairman and Member of the Review Group)

David Kenneally (Water Safety Examiner)

Paddy Phipps (Water Safety Examiner)

Willie Doyle (Water Safety Examiner)

Appendix II

Duties of Water Safety Development Officer

1. Liaise with Irish Water Safety and County Committee on behalf of Local Authority and attend at meeting for that purpose.
2. Act as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of local committee as may be required.
3. Organisation of fund-raising to meet targets laid down by the Irish Water Safety.
4. Arrange for preparation of water safety budget and secure Local Authority contributions to Irish Water Safety.
5. Arrange for purchase of water safety equipment for beach guards, lifeguards, instructors and examiners.
6. Recruitment and supervision of lifeguards/beach guards particularly in bathing areas of national and tourist interest.
7. Arranging for the erection of ring buoys and safety equipment in both areas and the carrying out of spot checks with a view to replacement as necessary.
8. Reporting to County Manager on all aspects of water safety.
9. Arranging for water safety reports on beaches and other aquatic locations in the interest of water safety.
10. Drawing up of safety plan of bathing areas in consultation with appropriate public bodies with particular reference to the necessity to zone areas for particular types of water activity.
11. Dealing with media on various aspects of water safety i.e. promotion of water safety, swimming instruction and awareness of dangers. Also dealing with media as may be required in relation to major drowning incidents.
12. Act as liaison officer and contact person with various bodies such as voluntary inshore rescue, sub aqua clubs, beach guard clubs, boating organizations and surfing groups.
13. Arranging for implementation of water safety programme including booking of pools, transport, recruitment of instructors and examiners.

14. Acting as liaison officer when required in relation to water safety in private pools and assisting with the recruitment of trained personnel in such pools.
15. Visiting National Schools to distribute "School Pack" Scheme, as necessary.
16. Responsibility for Water Safety Code issued by the Department of Environment.
17. The above list of duties is not exhaustive and it is open to each Manager to assign new duties to Water Safety Development Officers from time to time.