

Guidance

☆ Subscribe

Guidance Number:

GU1006

Guidance Title:

Launch and Recovery - GU1006

Applicability:

Lifesaving Operations

Reason for Guidance:

To help in the guidance of Launching and Recovery of Lifeboats

Objective of Guidance:

To provide help and assistance for the Launching and Recovery of Lifeboats

Guidance:

Responsibilities of the Launching Authority (LOM, DLA or Thames Commander)

Unless weather conditions preclude it, the Launching Authority will order the assembly of the crew and the launching of the lifeboat if, in their opinion, a message is received from the Coastguard (CG) (or other Co-ordinating Authority) informing them that a vessel or lives are in danger within the area covered by the lifeboat, whether or not signals of distress have been made. They will at once inform the Co-ordinating Authority of the action they have taken and maintain communications with the Authority.

The Launching Authority will use their discretion whether to launch if such a report is received from a source other than the Coastguard or Co-ordinating Authority. The lifeboat should always be launched, weather conditions permitting, if such a report leaves room for doubt whether or not lives are in danger.

The Launching Authority must keep the Coastguard or Co-ordinating Authority informed of their intentions, when the lifeboat is launched and when it returns to station.

The Launching Authority may receive a message, from any source, that a vessel requires assistance to get out of difficulties but that no lives are in danger. In these circumstances, they should not order the launch of the lifeboat unless they are satisfied that no other suitable craft is available.

Whenever conditions have become dangerous at the harbour entrance, slipway or beach since the lifeboat proceeded on a service, it is the responsibility of the Launching Authority to inform the Coxswain, ILB Helm or IRH Commander before the lifeboat returns. The decision whether the lifeboat should return to its own station or to another place must, however, rest with the Coxswain, ILB Helm or IRH Commander.

Authority to Launch on Service

The Coxswain, ILB Helm or IRH Commander will normally receive the authority to launch from the Launching Authority. If the Coxswain, ILB Helm or IRH Commander receives information that lives are in danger at sea from any other source, whether distress signals are displayed or not, they must report that fact to the Launching Authority unless, in their opinion, delay would result in danger of loss of life. In such a case, they must use their best ability to assemble the crew, launch the lifeboat and proceed to the assistance of the casualty or person in difficulty. When there is no likelihood of danger to life, the Coxswain, ILB Helm or IRH Commander must not order the launch of the lifeboat without specific authority from the Launching Authority.

If the Coxswain, ILB Helm or IRH Commander launches the lifeboat on their own authority, they must arrange for the Launching Authority to be informed of the action taken at the earliest opportunity.

Launching an IRB or RWC

The authority to launch an IRB or RWC rests with the Senior Lifeguard on duty. They must take into consideration the combination of size of the surf, sea state, wind speed & direction, the competency and experience of the crew and balance this with the severity of the situation to which they are responding. If a decision to allow an IRB or RWC to launch is made by the Senior Lifeguard, the final decision to launch still rests with the IRB helm or RWC driver who has ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew and the craft whilst at sea.

Safety on Launching and Recovery

The Area Lifesaving Manager (ALM) is responsible for arranging, where necessary, an appropriate procedure is in force for ensuring complete cessation of movement during the launching or re-housing of the lifeboat or for such other measures as may be dictated by legislation currently in force e.g., the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 or the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 for the Republic of Ireland. (NB: the usual method is by blowing a whistle).

Additionally, at slipway stations, only those crew with specific tasks should be on the slipway during recovery operations.

At stations where specialised launching tractors capable of being operated in a partially submerged state are used, Tractor Drivers, Deputy Tractor Drivers, Head Launchers and Deputy Head Launchers who ride on the tractor must wear the special RNLI lifejacket specifically provided for these personnel.

The RNLI operates some equipment and vehicles that have limited visibility. In certain instances, (primarily in the County tractor), this has been overcome by operating in a standing position.

Improvements in how we manage our launch and recovery operations alongside the effective use of shore crew, marshals, and head launchers should **remove the operators need to stand**.

A thorough brief between the head launcher, plant operator, shore crew and marshals covering the intended movement, roles and communications are all essential parts of a safe operation, which mitigates safety risks and meets our legal obligations.

Seat belts must be worn (where fitted) when not operating in the water. This is to ensure that the operator is safely restrained in the vehicle and compliant with the law.

Before the tractor enters the water or at the handover point (top of a slipway) the operator **must** remove the seatbelt. This is to ensure they can exit swiftly in the event of an emergency.

Should your station identify a reason not to wear the seat belt or a different point at which it is deemed necessary to remove the seat belt, this should be recorded in a risk assessment and documented in your Launch and Recovery or Local Knowledge LOP. An example of this maybe where a station is situated at the top of a slipway or ramp which leads directly into the water

Launch and Recovery of Lifeboats from Beaches

All lifeboat stations who operate launch and recovery equipment for beach-launching of ILB's and ALB's must pay particular attention and take great care when operating from beaches that have been affected by the winter storms.

In particular, launching and recovering into unknown and unseen bottom conditions on low tides must be undertaken with thorough care, and with as much inspection of the launch area as is safely possible. Drivers of L&R vehicles are advised to ensure that they practice and consider escape and emergency procedures regularly to ensure that they can safely exit the vehicle in case of an emergency.

Stations should increase awareness and routinely discuss, procedures and Local Operating Procedures (LOPS) for vehicle bog-ins. Should a dangerous bog-in occur, and the vehicle become swamped, crews are to carefully consider the risks involved in effecting an immediate recovery of the vehicle or whether it would be safer to wait for more favourable conditions and support. In many situations once the vehicle is swamped, the damage is already done. [PR1079](#) must be understood and followed.

All lifeboat stations are advised to review storm damage and topography changes within their normal operational areas, and to amend LOPs accordingly. In particular, training exercises in locations which may have been affected by these changes should be reviewed, and if necessary amendments made to the exercise plan to reduce the risk to crews and equipment.

RNLI Support Centre (Poole) Assistance

If additional guidance is required and your ALM is unavailable, the Launching Authority should telephone the COIR Duty Officer at RNLI Support Centre (Poole).

Reference Documents:

n/a

Related Policies, Procedures & Guidance:

[GU1028 - Lines Under Load](#)

Related Forms & Instructions:

n/a