



## THROW LINES for water safety

Someone out of their depth in water - with or without buoyancy equipment or protective clothing - will hopefully be swimming under some control or floundering and out of control. Both can provide problems for helpers but the latter usually presents a dangerous challenge to a potential rescuer.

The key to success in water rescue is usually speed - suggesting that once a victim is out of reach from bank, boat or shore, additional and potentially lethal problems occur. Most experts agree that reaching with a solid object, such as an oar, is the safest method of offering assistance. This assumes that the victim is within an oar's distance and the rescuer can let go if the victim decides to irresistibly pull.

Throwing is the second best way of offering assistance. Any buoyant object, purpose-made or not, will often suffice. However, it is quite possible to be swept to oblivion whilst clinging to a floating object! This implies that a thrown item should be attached to a line which, itself, is held securely. A weighty and tethered object thrown, has a very small chance of reaching a small target more than only a few yards away and, in any case, rather like the oar, will not be available anyway. Weighted throw lines are usually short lengths of cord, coiled or packed in such a way as to be convenient to throw to someone who may be in difficulty.

Wading is the next most preferable method of rescue but usually leads to out-of-depth scenarios. There is one golden rule - entering the water to approach a victim should be a last resort, always done with a great deal of caution and some previous experience or training. Many, many people have been saved by incautious acts of bravery but, equally, many, many innocent and well-meaning potential rescuers have died in rescue attempts.

Small, purpose made throw lines may be considered **ESSENTIAL** to anyone who runs the risk of falling into water accidentally. Obviously, the throw line **MUST** be on the shore or bank, or in the boat when this occurs; equally obviously, someone **MUST** be available to throw. This implies that more than one person should always be available when there is a risk of falling into water. Small teams of people who are exposed to the risk of falling into water, should be trained and have available one or two throw lines.

The method used to pack a line into the **THROW BAG** is crucially important. When thrown, the bag must reach the target, the line must pay out and the end must be securely held by (but **NOT** tied to) the thrower. Properly manufactured throw bags will have instructions for use and repacking attached.

It is **ESSENTIAL** that all personnel are trained to use, and have practised using, the throw bag. Novices are unlikely to be able to accurately throw and subsequent endeavors almost always fail

because of tangles and over-hasty attempts. Lines are usually best delivered UNDERARM and beyond the victim. In moving-water scenarios, the best deliveries are beyond and slightly downstream of victims. Fast flowing water or windy situations are especially difficult and somewhat more dangerous for everyone. Local topography may produce additional hazards. ALWAYS survey the location and plan for emergency procedures - RISK ASSESSMENTS.

Anyone who is rescued may require medical treatment as they are often in shock, sometimes bruised and battered. The recognition of and treatment for hypothermia should be known by everyone. All those in a party exposed to accidents in water should be familiar with rescue drills, resuscitation skills and methods of obtaining assistance. Buoyancy equipment, protective clothing and additional training may be required under working or safety guidelines.

In summary -

Call for assistance: REACH, THROW or, if safe, WADE. Use properly manufactured throw bags. Practice the technique of throwing the bag to a target. Practice repacking at speed and alternatives to repacking. Know how to resuscitate.

Understand hypothermia. Reconnoiter locations thoroughly. Produce location and activity risk assessments. When operating in particularly hazardous locations or in bad weather or in isolated situations, a mobile telephone is now considered an essential safety item. Courses can be arranged by your safety department.