

The experts keeping rail staff safe when working near water

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Specialists in water-based training are warning employers in the rail, civil engineering and construction sectors not to fall foul of the requirements to staff working near water.

All personnel working within three metres of open water are required to have undertaken water safety awareness courses, rescue equipment training and be equipped with Aquatic Personal Protective Equipment (APPE). This is part of DEFRA guidance for emergency services and utilities personnel.

In a bid to equip those in the rail industry with the skills needed to operate safely near water, Birmingham & Midland Marine Services has developed tailor-made courses suited to rail businesses, as well as highways and construction.

The company's training centre in Staffordshire specialises in providing occupational waterside training in the three main areas:

- Occupational water safety and rescue
- Powered safety and rescue boat
- Commercial workboat

The courses are accredited by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Outreach Rescue, Royal Life Saving Society, Royal Yachting Association, and the Canal & River Trust.

Richard Gray, Operations Manager at Birmingham & Midlands Marine Services, said: "Many compliance and health & safety managers are still unaware of the requirement for employers should the risk of accidental immersion have been shown in the risk assessment under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015.

"This includes providing water safety awareness, Aquatic Personal Protective Equipment (APPE) and rescue equipment training."

Mr Gray says far too often they are finding staff have not been trained to use the equipment properly, and in some cases the equipment isn't up to scratch.

He said: "Clients are arriving for training with their own lifejackets issued to them by work and far too regularly they have not been shown how to wear them correctly and what to check.

"Many lifejackets are found that wouldn't activate in the case of an immersion, in many instances candidates Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) are missing vital components and are out of date.

"Rescue throw-bags are becoming more common and candidates are encouraged to get their issues throw-bag out of the van and actually try it out in practice. Over half of the kit deployed fails to function due to a lack of basic checks and the operatives not being aware of how to utilise the equipment correctly.

"Issuing APPE and rescue equipment without providing the operative with a grounded knowledge of how to operate it correctly shouldn't be acceptable. It is evident that there is much confusion, industry wide, about what type of APPE/PFD to choose for a particular environment and, in the case of lifejackets which type of firing mechanism suits the role of the operative."

Among the water safety courses includes:

- Royal Life Saving Society – National Water Safety Management Programme.
- Outreach Rescue – Water Safety/Rescue Awareness.
- Outreach Rescue – Water Rescue First Responder – DEFRA compliant courses at a higher level for bank rescue teams, HART paramedics, fire & rescue personnel.

The above courses all entail the candidate being able to demonstrate successfully both co-worker and self-rescue from the water; still water and river venues are available.

Birmingham & Midland Marine Services also offers a range of powerboat operator training at a second training centre in a stately home and grounds with a sixty-acre, private lake plus venues include the canal network, navigable and non-navigable rivers.

Both the Royal Life Saving Society National Water Safety Management Programme and the Outreach Rescue Water Safety/ Rescue Awareness courses are one-day in duration. Prices start from £150 (plus access fees and APPE hire if applicable). Courses are either Health & Safety Executive endorsed/ DEFRA and CDM Regs 15 compliant. Bespoke courses can also be arranged.

For more details, visit www.midlandmarine.co.uk, email midsmarine@gmail.com or call 07527 727169.

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