	Document Title	Working On or Near Water Policy		
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Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Working On or Near Water Policy

1. Statement Of Intent

The Society's policy:

- Is valid from the Issue Date until such time as an updated version is published.
- Will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if required by changes to the Society's activities, to legislation or to best practice guidance.
- Applies to all SCRS Members and Non-Members who are carrying out activities for, or on behalf of the Society, paid or unpaid. The Society does not currently employ any staff.

The Society's intention is to:

- Prevent accidents and injuries to Members, Non-Members and Others.
- Promote good health and wellbeing.
- Manage health, safety and environmental risks when carrying out the Society's activities.
- Provide instructions, information and training (where appropriate).
- Ensure that suitable clothing, footwear and personal protective equipment is worn when necessary.
- Provide, maintain and securely store any tools, equipment, substances and materials.
- Ensure that activities are carried out in a safe and healthy working environment and that arrangements are in place in case of an emergency.
- Consult with Members on matters affecting their health, safety and wellbeing.

2. Introduction

The Society is keen to promote the safe enjoyment of the Canal and the wider environment. The Sankey Valley provides people with health and wellbeing opportunities by exploring the watercourses, ponds, natural environments and heritage assets along its approximately 16 miles of route.

The Society will promote water safety and work with Others to raise awareness of the risks presented by waterways. SCRS encourages everyone to participate in the 'Home & Dry' online water safety and rescue training by West Mercia Search and Rescue.

The Society occasionally undertakes inspection, vegetation clearance or minor maintenance activities on or in the water. Most activities are on land but they can involve Members being near to water (within 2 metres), for example litter picking, vegetation clearance and minor maintenance of structures.

3. Risks Associated When Working On or Near Water

- Slips, trips and falls on bridges, towpaths, lock gates, embankments and other structures can cause injury, a loss of consciousness or a fall into the water.
- Plants, weeds, silt and soft banking can obscure the water's edge, causing people to slip, fall in or become stuck.

- Deep water and steep sides can make it difficult for people to self-rescue or be rescued by Others.
- Very cold water and under-currents can cause cramp, hypothermia, shock and heart attacks.
- Plants (including invasive species), vegetation, tree branches, discarded rubbish and hidden debris can cause eye injuries, cuts and skin infections.
- Illness can be caused by swallowing or being immersed in contaminated water or by being exposed to biological hazards from algal blooms or plant spores.
- Discarded materials, loose rubbish and debris or spillage of fluids can cause significant harm to people, pets and wildlife, or contamination of the environment or pollution of watercourses.
- Weil's disease (leptospirosis) is a bacterial infection that can be caught by people usually through open wounds that are immersed in water contaminated with rat or cattle urine. It causes flu like symptoms including a high fever and vomiting and, in severe cases, heart, liver or respiratory failure.

4. Precautions To Be Taken

Action must be taken to prevent people and materials from being injured or from falling into the water:

- Prior to starting any activity the risks must be identified and assessed. All necessary precautions must be taken depending on the nature and location of the task, the depth and flow of water and the weather conditions. For example, provision of barrier protection, toe boards, storage trays for tools, personal protective equipment, access ladder, throw line, life ring and a rescue procedure.
- Where possible keep activities and people away from the water's edge.
- Only experienced and competent people should enter the water to carry out activities. Numbers of people should be kept to a minimum and they must be suitable equipped, for example with waders.
- As a minimum, Task Team Leaders to have completed the 'Home & Dry' online water safety and rescue training by West Mercia Search and Rescue. Other training requirements and qualifications for SCRS Trustees and Committee Members are identified in the SCRS Training Plan.
- No lone working in water is allowed.
- A life jacket or buoyancy aid is not normally required when working in or near shallow water less than 3' or 1 metre deep. Site conditions and works tasks must be assessed though and if deemed necessary a life jacket or buoyancy aid must be worn.
- Activities on the tow path must still allow for the safe passage of pedestrians, horse riders, cyclists and vehicles (unless it is agreed with a landowner to close the normal access and put a diversion in place). Warning signs, safety barriers and 'look-out' people must be considered and provided where necessary, depending on the task being undertaken. Additional precautions might be required to protect vulnerable users such as children or disabled people.
- Be aware of changes in the locality that could cause a change in water levels, an inrush of water or a dry channel to fill up, for example from a sewer outfall pipe or a sluice gate.
- There is a possibility of encountering discarded syringes and other drug related items especially in urban areas. Do not reach into chambers and hidden areas without checking them first. Wear gloves and use a litter picking grab to carefully place items in a 'sharps' box for safe disposal.
- Good personal hygiene practices must be followed; wash hands and forearms before eating, drinking or smoking and protect minor cuts and abrasions from contamination with waterproof plasters.

5. Deep Water

Any proposed activity in a deep channel, lock chamber, deep or fast flowing watercourse and tidal waters introduces additional or more severe risks. Deep water is deemed to be 3' or 1 metre or more deep.

- The activity must be planned and risk assessed by a suitably experienced and competent person(s).

- An appropriate method of work must be agreed and the contingency / emergency arrangements must be put in place prior to any activities starting on site.
- Life jackets / buoyancy aids must be worn by people in the water or immediately adjacent to the water.
- Consent must be obtained from the appropriate regulatory bodies and the property or land owner, for example the Environment Agency or navigation authority.

6. Watercraft Management

The Society has an inflatable battery powered dinghy for inspection and maintenance activities on shallow inland waters only. The following provisions apply in addition to the Precautions in Section 4:

- Dinghy is rated for four people but in normal use should be crewed by two people supported by a minimum of one land based person.
- Ensure the appropriate SCRS insurance policy and waterway consents (if required) are in place prior to use of the dinghy.
- Dinghy, batteries, oars and equipment must be checked before and after each use (including inflating the craft before entering the water), and regularly cleaned of weeds, debris and mud.
- Identify a suitable access point into the waterway. Boat crew to obtain the assistance of other volunteers to secure the craft when alighting and disembarking.
- Boat crew must be suitably experienced and competent for the task being carried out.
- At least one member of the boat crew should hold the Royal Yachting Association's Level 2 Powerboat Handling qualification (or similar) for safe, self-sufficient powerboat and rigid inflatable boat handling and operation.
- Lifejackets must be worn and tools and equipment safely stowed on the floor of the craft.
- A mobile phone or personal two-way radio in a waterproof pocket or wallet must be carried by the boat crew and communication lines tested with the land crew beforehand.
- Boat crew and land crew to remain in visual and / or mobile communication with each other whilst the boat is in use.

7. Invasive Species

Watercourses and canal banks are attractive habitats for invasive species. An invasive species is an introduced species that harms its new environment. Invasive species adversely affect habitats and bioregions, causing ecological, environmental, and economic damage.

They often out-compete native species for resources and damage ecosystems. They can spread rapidly and be difficult or expensive to control; spores and seeds for example can be carried on workwear or tools. Common plant examples are Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed (poisonous to the touch) and Floating Pennywort. Mammals include Grey Squirrels and American Mink. Marine species include Signal Crayfish and Quagga Mussels.

There are specific measures to control the spread of invasive species. For more information see HM Government's Non Native Species Secretariat

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