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Launch statistics show a busy 2009 for Tower and Chiswick RNLI lifeboats in Central London

RNLI lifeboats operating on the River Thames in central London have had another busy year according to figures released today (Monday 25 January), with crews at Tower and Chiswick among the top three busiest across the UK and Republic of Ireland.

At Tower RNLI lifeboat station, which is situated on the River Thames directly beneath Waterloo Bridge, the crew launched on 380 rescue missions. The number of people rescued by the crew in 2009 was 148, an increase on the previous year's figure of 99.

In 2009 Chiswick lifeboat crew launched 186 times, up from 149 in 2008, and they rescued a total of 78 people, again an increase from the 42 people rescued in 2008.

The official figures have been released to coincide with the charity's biggest national fundraising day, SOS Day, which takes place on Friday 29 January. Collectively the statistics highlight the need for support for the vital lifesaving service on the tidal reaches of the River Thames running through the nation's capital, one of the busiest waterways in the United Kingdom.

Tower lifeboat station was, once again, the busiest lifeboat station across the entire RNLI operations in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Poole was the second busiest, and Chiswick was the third busiest. Lifeboats from the four Thames stations launched 749 times, higher than the 703 launches carried out in 2008.

Of the 749 launches carried out in 2009 by lifeboats from Chiswick, Tower, Teddington and Gravesend, 236 were to assist individuals who were in danger on or near the river. Categorized officially as 'people in distress', this number – which makes up almost a third of the total launches – includes a percentage of people who deliberately enter the water and put themselves at risk.

Out of the other 510 launches, 41 were to commercial vessels, and 188 were to assist people using pleasure craft, be they engine powered, manual or sailing vessels. The remaining launches were required for a variety of reasons, including stranded animals, mechanical failure, motor vehicles in the river, and even an unexploded bomb.

Andrew Ashton, Divisional Inspector for the RNLI, said: 'The figures illustrate the ongoing need for funds to ensure our lifeboat crew continue to get the necessary training and expertise to enable them to save lives on the river and at sea.

'Once again Tower lifeboat station is the busiest out of the 235 RNLI stations around the coast of the UK and Ireland. Unfortunately, such is the nature of life in a large,

fast-paced city and with such a sizeable population, there are some people who threaten to enter the water deliberately, we can only assume in an attempt to take their own lives.

‘The RNLI is a charity – we do not judge and we make no distinction as to why a person is in difficulty at sea or in the river Thames. As far as we are concerned we rescue people in distress. Fortunately, there have been many occasions where people have expressed their gratitude for our assistance, despite what their intentions may have been.’

Andrew added: ‘Thames RNLI lifeboats are operating on one of the busiest inland waterways in the country, amid a population of more than nine million. With so many living, working, visiting and playing either by or on the river, it is little surprise that the volunteer crews at Tower and Chiswick lifeboat stations have been so busy.

SOS Day, the RNLI’s biggest fundraising event, takes its name from the international mayday distress signal, Save Our Souls. For fundraising purposes, supporters have been encouraged to adopt the letters S O S to come up with themed fundraising events. One example is the crew of Chiswick and Teddington lifeboat stations who will undertake ‘Sponsor Our Scullers’, a 24-hour rowing marathon inside the Bentall Centre shopping centre in Kingston.

For more information on how you can support the RNLI SOS Day, log on to www.rnli.org.uk/sos

Ends

Notes to editors

RNLI media contacts

For more information please telephone Tim Ash, Divisional Media Relations Manager (South East and London) on 01825 747727 or 07785 296252, email tash@rnli.org.uk or call HQ Public Relations on 01202 336789.

RNLI online: For more information on the RNLI please visit www.rnli.org.uk. News releases and other media resources, including [RSS feeds](#), downloadable photos and video, are available at the RNLI [Press Centre](#).

Key facts about the RNLI: The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea. Its volunteers provide a 24-hour search and rescue service around the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland coasts. The RNLI operates over 230 lifeboat stations in the UK and Ireland and has more than 140 lifeguard units on beaches around the UK. The RNLI is independent of Coastguard and government and depends on voluntary donations and legacies to maintain its rescue service. Since the RNLI was founded in 1824 its lifeboat crews and lifeguards have saved over 137,000 lives.

Visit the RNLI's official [YouTube channel](#) for more films and follow our rescue stories on [Twitter](#).

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