

The Crew: How they train for and operate in an emergency.

Joining the RNLI

Each crew member after a probationary and training period is invited to join the RNLI a contract is signed and the member is made aware of their responsibilities and Health & Safety implications. An individual 'pager' is issued and this is tested once a week at a prearranged time to check the system operation. The pager is used at any time of the day or night to alert all crew members, therefore ensuring that adequate crew numbers can be mustered to take the boat, the essential members are the Coxswain, Mechanic, Radio Officer and Tractor driver (without whom the Lifeboat will not be launched). The lifeboat is designed for a crew of 6, but it is at the Coxswain's discretion regarding the crew and numbers taken, more may be required if for example a wide area visual search is required.

Some stations have dedicated crew teams who are on standby for set periods. At Anstruther it is only within the three coxswain that an unofficial rota takes place, to maintain constant cover.

Pager alert

A typical scenario of events would be, a boat in distress calls on Channel 16 (the channel monitored 24hrs a day 7 days a week 365 days a year by the Coast Guard.)

The call is picked up, contact made, location established and nature of the distress if possible. The Launching Authority is immediately contacted in Anstruther, the pagers are alerted to 'Immediate Readiness' or 'Launch ALB'.

'Immediate Readiness' requests all the crew available to assemble at the Boathouse for detailed instructions, 'Launch ALB' requires the lifeboat to be launched as quickly and safely as possible. The decision to launch is taken by the Coxswain and Hon Sec Launch Authority.

As the crew muster, the coxswain has to be certain he has the appropriate crew for the task in hand, the launch crew will be checking the safety of the carriage, starting the tractor and preparing to move the Lifeboat to launch position, low tide levels present further problems. (See the section on Launch & Recovery)

The Coxswain takes control of the Lifeboat from the Head Launcher at the point of launch from the carriage. The Radio Officer and Helm will be quickly trying to establish the best course to the location if given by the Coast Guard, all under the control of the Coxswain.

All this can be achieved within 5 minutes!

After the Launch, Recovery and Ready for the next 'Shout'

Launch crew will now make good the carriage and await the return of the Lifeboat.

Because of the tidal fluctuations within Anstruther harbour it is not always possible for the lifeboat to enter the harbour or remain at a pier with sufficient water to leave the berth if called out again. While waiting for the correct tide level for safe recovery onto the carriage, the coxswain may in some circumstances decide to secure the lifeboat at Pittenweem harbour (where even at low tide, water depth is always available) and return to Anstruther when the tide allows. The crew would therefore be collected from Pittenweem (or other any other safe harbour) and returned to the station.

The pagers would again be activated to recall the Lifeboat crew and launch crew, at a given time for recovery at Anstruther slipway (Rescue archive details these events) Once back in the Boathouse the Lifeboat is immediately refuelled and made ready for the next service call. The Coast Guard are also informed that the Lifeboat is again available for service. A Debriefing is held with the crew and Service reports made to the RNLI HQ.