

# British Caving Association

## British Caving Association Lone Working Document

The coroner's report for the 2019 coasteering fatality has led to the AALA Inspectorate, British Canoeing, National Coasteering Charter and others to look at guidance for their activities with particular reference to lone working, an incident involving the leader or the leader dealing with a serious situation. British Caving Association Qualifications Management Committee (BCA QMC) has considered this for led caving/mine exploration situations. Below are some areas of background information followed by some recommendations.

### A Brief Outline of the Coroner's Report

#### Coroner raises safety concerns following a coasteering fatality

The inquest into the death of a client on a coasteering trip in Dorset in 2019 concluded recently. Following the inquest, the coroner sent a 'Report to Prevent Future Deaths' to various organisations expressing safety concerns.

The coroner has expressed concerns about three areas of safety management on led coasteering sessions:

1. problems created by a single guide/instructor working alone – can an emergency be managed if the guide/instructor is incapacitated or, as was the case in this incident, the guide/instructor must attend to an emergency with one client;
2. access to means for summoning emergency assistance if needed;
3. client awareness of the true nature of the activity and its physical demands and provider awareness of clients' physical health and swimming ability.

Issues raised:

This incident highlights some key questions for coasteering safety management arrangements.

1. How are clients made aware of the true nature and demands of an activity?
2. How are instructors/guides made aware of the relevant health and fitness issues of the clients?
3. How are 'go or no-go' decisions made? How should guides judge existing and expected conditions as appropriate to a particular group of clients?
4. What happens if a lone guide is incapacitated for any reason? Can the group manage the situation? How do they know what to do? How does the provider decide the clients can do what needs to be done?
5. If an assistant guide is deployed what are the minimum competencies required of them?
6. How will emergency services be summoned if needed? If they can't be called immediately how will the intervening time gap be managed in such a way that the group continues to be safely led?

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The coroner's comments in full and the report are available at the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary website.

## Work at Heights Regulations 2005 and Amendments 2007

HSE released Guidance on the application of the work at heights amendment regulations 2005 to persons instructing climbing and caving. In this guidance; paragraph 17 refers to regulation 4 which refers to planning for emergencies and rescues.

- The regulations make reference to planning for emergencies and rescue as part of the overall planning process. Providers may include this in their risk assessment, operating procedures, in a separate emergency procedures document or by reference to the appropriate sections from the relevant NGB syllabus. In this sector, instructors will be trained and assessed as competent to deal with emergencies and to effect rescue within the scope of their operations. If an instructor is unable to deal with the situation quickly and effectively themselves, they should raise the alarm by making contact with their base or with the emergency services. In many cases, instructors will be operating distant from a base with a client group. There is no expectation that the clients will be trained to effect rescue and it will be sufficient that someone in the group knows what to do if the instructor becomes incapacitated. Further information can be found in L77.
- <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l77.htm>

## BCA QMC has suggested looking at the context of the caving environment when reviewing operating procedures and Risk Assessments.

What could go wrong and how does the group deal with it?

- Caving is normally a static event. IE if the participants stand still nothing will happen such as being washed away by a river or the tide. Occasionally there may be fast flowing water but it is usually shallow.
- There is the possibility of the group being split E.G. half the group may be at the bottom of the pitch and half may be at the top.
- There is the very slim possibility of the instructor being hit by a rock while ascending a pitch.
- If the Instructor is dealing with an incident with a member of the group the rest of the group can stop what they are doing and await further information. They may need to get into a safe place or into a group shelter but they will be contained.
- If the Instructor becomes incapacitated and is unable to carry on s/he may be able to continue giving information even if they can't actually carry on caving.
- If the instructor is incapacitated and unconscious or worse?
- If an assistant is needed, they should be capable of carrying out first aid and exiting the cave safely on their own to be useful (i.e. classed as an assistant)? (not just another adult).

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- The emergency bag (first aid kit, group shelter, medication etc.) should be with the instructor at all times or maybe only a few metres away, not left at the cave entrance or in the minibus.

## Recommendations

**Information that the group should know (briefing)/have access to in the emergency bag and points to consider before going underground.**

- First Aid Kit/medication that is for an individual within the group e.g. asthma inhaler/EpiPen/angina spray
- Group Shelter
- What cave they are in and what part?
- Cave survey if appropriate
- What an individual should do if they get separated from the group.
- Emergency contacts of instructor and how to call Cave Rescue and/or centre/organisation- information in the first aid kit?
- When will cave rescue be called by organisation/call out contact if they don't have contact with the group?
- Can/should the group get out of the cave without the instructor? Once out do they have a phone?
- Any site specific hazards e.g. safe areas in case of flood or long wait
- See the PLOW emergency card on BCA website. This gives lots of useful advice but it is aimed at all cavers not just instructed groups.

<https://british-caving.org.uk/documents/caving-emergency-card/?tmstv=1731930652>