

# **Be prepared when you venture into open water**

**It's summer, the time when people are tempted to go wild swimming, paddle boarding or canoeing in lakes and reservoirs, but safety experts have stressed that there are real dangers to life unless you are properly prepared.**

Finn van Barneveld, local area liaison officer, Prevention and Protection, City of Edinburgh, stressed the importance of safety at a public exhibition at Harlaw Reservoir near Balerno where all these activities are regular activities.

Harlaw has a depth of 60ft in places and therefore water users, must, he said take things seriously.

The initiative was supported by other organisations and van Barneveld said: "One of the main reasons we are at Harlaw is to send out a partnership message on behalf of us, the Pentland Park Rangers, the police and Scottish Water and ourselves that bodies of water across Scotland rarely get above 14c.

"It may be a nice warm day but, when your body hits that cold water, it can shut down and that can make it extremely difficult for you to breathe and to swim. Unfortunately, that causes incidents and fatalities in reservoirs."

Bailiffs who are on duty checking trout fishing permits at

Harlaw Reservoir have noted people paddle boarding without life jackets or wet suits and just wearing swimsuits so how dangerous is that?

He said: "We would always advise that you are up-to-date with the Water Safety for Scotland advice for paddle boarding which is pertinent just now and you should also have the correct floating devices with you just in case something goes wrong. You should also be aware of the weather and anything else that is going on at the reservoir."

Swimmers should also, he said, be aware of the advice from the Water Safety for Scotland and he added: "Make sure you understand what the safety information is and also make sure that other people know where they are."

"Simple precautions and it is common sense a lot of it but must be aware of how cold that water is. Also, there are hidden structures beneath the water and, if you jump into the water, there might be something relatively shallow under that surface which can do damage."

People who paddle are not exempt and they should be aware that the first few feet may be OK because the sun has been on the water but, after that, the temperature drops and he added: "Jumping off platforms into water will be a lot colder than you think."

"So, our basic message is to be safe and, if you fall in the water, make sure you have the right gear on to ensure you come back out of that water. Be safe at all times."

PICTURE: Harlaw Reservoir, a popular place for fishing but also for other activities on the water, but safety experts warn of the dangers. Pictures by **Alex Rose**

