water safety Scotland

Unique Location Codes – Guidance for Scotland

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Introduction

On average, 96 people drown every year in Scotland. 50 of these are accidental meaning the average accidental drowning rate in Scotland is 0.93 per 100,000 population. This rate is almost double the drowning rate of the UK as a whole[1].

Water Safety Scotland (WSS) works to prevent water-related fatalities through the implementation of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy and the Minister's Action Plan[2]. As part of this, there is a key focus on safety signage which can alert the public to the dangers of water in known high risk areas. A report on the consistency of water safety signage[3] was completed in 2022 by WSS partners and a subsequent project to study public perceptions of signage was completed in early 2024.

WSS recommends that signage should include a Unique Location Code (ULC) so that members of the public calling 999 can advise the emergency control rooms of the location of the incident. Public Rescue Equipment (PRE) stations can also be fitted with a ULC which, if integrated into emergency control room systems, can help call handlers provide information to 999 callers on the location of the nearest PRE.

There is currently no standard or format for ULCs. Some areas use their own locally derived ULC, whilst others use grid references or what3words. This results in inconsistencies which can lead to confusion in the developing stages of an emergency which may result in delaying an emergency response.

Glasgow City have a ULC format which is relevant for the city and has proven to be successful within its boundaries. However, when considering the wider topography found in Scotland, this system may not be applicable to other water locations.

This guidance document has been written with one key objective: to provide a consistent ULC format for use in Scotland that can be used for water safety assets such as signs, PRE stations, and other fixed installations. This will help promote consistency and ensure one format for embedment into emergency service control room systems. This is a guidance document only – areas may create and use their own ULCs should they wish, however, please note that this could lead to inconsistencies across areas and undermine the benefits of a national ULC format.

The benefits of one ULC format

WSS and local Partnership Approach to Water Safety (PAWS) groups work together to improve water safety nationally and locally through consistent approaches.

Having one ULC format across Scotland will have the following benefits:

- A recognisable and uniform format for the public to be aware of and use

- Consistency between control room services making asset mobilisation more efficient

- Reduction in concerns or issues in areas with confusing or hard to pronounce names e.g. Loch a'Bhadaidh Daraich.

- PRE stations can be mapped, and their locations provided to 999 callers based on the proximity to the ULC sign they have called from.

Guidance for the creation of ULC

This guidance is intentionally simple to keep the ULC short and consistent yet unique for each location.

Step 1

Signage should begin with 'S' for Scotland, followed by the location code of the local authority as specified in ONS codes S12[4]. These have been summarised in table 1. This will make clear the local authority area in which the asset is located.

Local Authority	Code	Local Authority	Code
Aberdeen City	33	Inverclyde	18
Aberdeenshire	34	Midlothian	19
Angus	41	Moray	20
Argyll and Bute	35	Na h-Eileanan Siar	13
City of Edinburgh	36	North Ayrshire	21
Clackmannanshire	05	North Lanarkshire	50
Dumfries and Galloway	06	Orkney Islands	23
Dundee City	42	Perth and Kinross	48
East Ayrshire	08	Renfrewshire	38
East Dunbartonshire	45	Scottish Borders	26
East Lothian	10	Shetland Islands	27
East Renfrewshire	11	South Ayrshire	28
Falkirk	14	South Lanarkshire	29
Fife	47	Stirling	30
Glasgow City	49	West Dunbartonshire	39
Highland	17	West Lothian	40

Table 1: Local authority codes

As Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the Cairngorms National Park span several local authorities, they have been assigned the following codes for use:

National Park	Code
Loch Lomond National Park	60
Cairngorms National Park	61

Table 2: Codes for National Parks

Step 2

Following a dash, this should then be followed by a unique number which is sequential. It is suggested that numbers increase in 5s to allow for additional signage to be added without the need to re-sequence the signs.

Step 3

A letter from the below should then be included to denote the asset type, or types, present at the location:

S = Water Safety Sign

P = Public Rescue Equipment station

I = Installation (Rescue Ladder / Pontoon / Slipway)

L = Launch Point (Access for emergency service rescue craft)

Where more than one asset is used, they should follow the hierarchy of S P I L.

e.g.

S20 – 5SPIL

Step 4

Signage on assets should include each of these ULCs.

In addition to using ULC, it is recommended that a location name and the OS grid reference are printed on any signage or PRE stations along with this ULC.

An example inland and coastal sign:

Water hazards are present here

BEWARE – SAILING AREA

BEWARE – COLD WATER

LEARN THE
WATER SAFETY CODE

Children must be supervised at all times

In an emergency, call 999 ask for Police and quote

Location code: S20-95S | Alloy Park – North West | OS Grid Ref: NN166 712

Water hazards are present here

BEWARE – SAILING AREA

BEWARE – COLD WATER

LEARN THE
WATER SAFETY CODE

Children must be supervised at all times

In an emergency, call 999 ask for Coastguard and quote

Location code: S35-90S | Sanders Cave | OS Grid Ref: NR637 206

The ULC should be placed in the bottom left-hand side of the sign. Any future updates to the ULC can be achieved by placing a vinyl sticker over this area.


Mapping

The assets should be mapped and saved in a Shapefile with the following requirements:

- Mapped using the British National Grid coordinates

The shape file should then be sent to **Improvement Service** for input into the Emergency Service Gazetteer.

Example of use and mapping

Within the following scenario, there is a large, well-used loch near main roads with easy access to the water. There are 8 asset points in this one location.
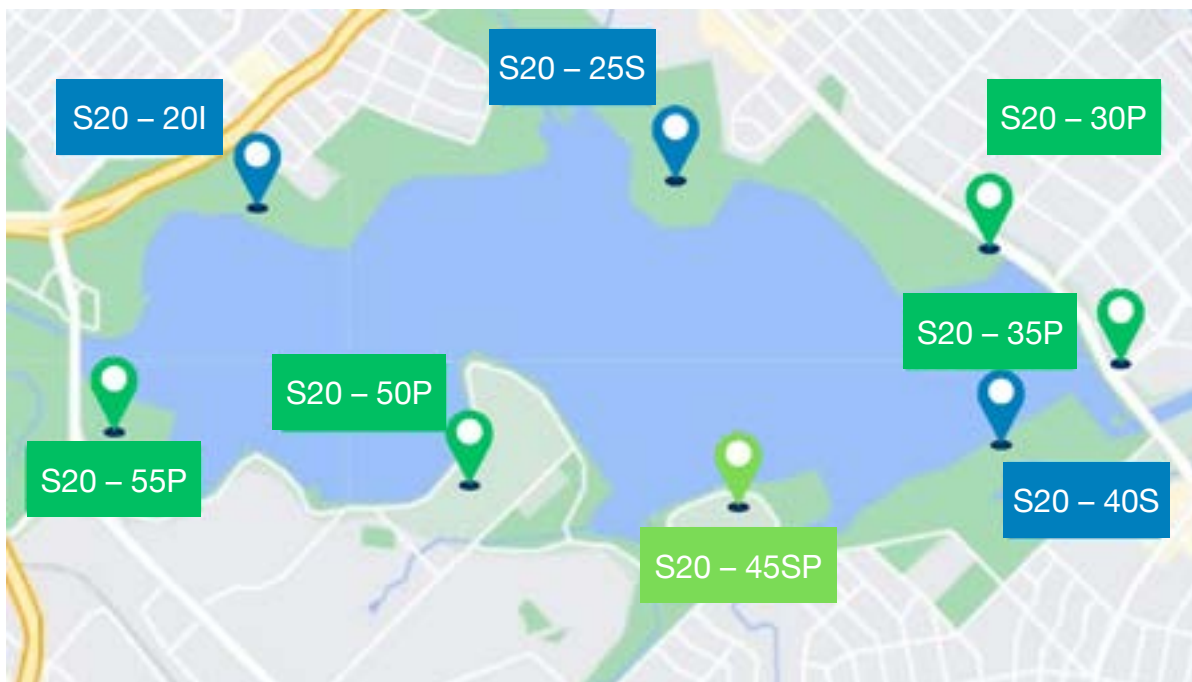
Code	Equipment	Lat/Long	Location Name
S20 – 20I	Installation	57.165852, -3.722165	Alloy Park – North West
S20 – 25S	Sign	57.167620, -3.714011	Alloy Park - North
S20 – 30P	PRE station	57.167387, -3.702853	Alloy Park North East
S20 – 35P	PRE station	57.165060, -3.700449	Alloy Park - East
S20 – 40S	Sign	57.162873, -3.703024	Alloy Park – South East
S20 – 45SP	Sign; PRE station	57.160080, -3.706543	Alloy Park - South
S20 – 50P	PRE station	57.158731, -3.711779	Alloy Park – South East point
S20 – 55P	PRE station	57.159150, -3.721392	Alloy Park – South East Path

Responsibility

The landowner or manager of the land is responsible for the creation, allocation, updates and management of the ULCs. This may be supported by local PAWS groups to help update changes or additions. It is also the responsibility of the landowner or manager to provide the ULCs to the emergency services. This can be supported through the local PAWS groups where representatives of the emergency services are members.

Conclusion

By taking a co-ordinated approach to allocating ULCs, Scotland can achieve a consistent system that enables members of the public to effectively direct emergency services to the scene of a water based incident.

This quick deployment of emergency responders is essential in resolving incidents in dynamic water environments. The use of ULCs will help to supplement the wider preventative efforts of Water Safety Scotland and its partners in reducing drowning incidents.

1 Water Safety Scotland (2018) *Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy* [online]. Available from: **watersafetyscotland.org.uk/media/1213/scotlands-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf**

2 Scottish Government, 2023. *Water Safety Stakeholder Group annual report: action plan* [online]. Available from: **gov.scot/publications/water-safety-stakeholder-group-action-plan/#:~:text=Following%20 a%20tragic%20spate%20of%20drowning%20incidents%20in,Scotland%20and%20reach%20agre-ement%20on%20appropriate%20next%20steps**

3 Water Safety Scotland, 2022. Water Safety Signage: Audit Report [online]. Available from: **watersafetyscotland.org.uk/practitioners-hub/water-safety-signage**

4 Office for National Statistics (2023). Local Authority Districts (December 2023) Boundaries UK BGC [online]. Available from: **geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/941217c8d0ea43fabdad50d9b39234f5_0/explore**