

# EMERGENCY RESPONSE AWARDS FOR NEW BEACH WARDENS



Pictured left to right: Niamh Hamill -Manager DAC, Jack Britton, Peter White. Aileen O'Doherty, Glen Cardiff, Jessica Hodgson -Project Officer, Paul Soffe, Kevin McCloskey, Derek Hemphill.

**Rosstownlough, Co. Donegal, Ireland** is one of the best known beaches in the country. Over the years it has suffered with litter louts, speeding cars and environmental damage to the ecological structure.

This week (27/05/04) Donegal County Council has appointed a team of six new Beach Wardens to address the issues.

The Wardens have just completed a RLSS programme, specially presented by **Trainer/Assessors Jack Britton and Paul Soffe**. The course tackled everything from environmental issues to beach safety and management.

Jack Britton who directed the course at the Donegal Adventure Centre said "The wardens successfully completed the RLSS Emergency Response (Open Water) Award. They have also been trained in Life Support, including basic aquatic First Aid. We explored the environmental issues pertaining to the beach, including hazards and usage patterns. They are trained to deal with emergency situations and assist the Lifeguards, from the land, in aquatic rescues.

The Wardens are not Gardai, but are trained to approach people whom are deemed to be causing a nuisance on the beach and if necessary alert the Gardai.

Their main role is environmental protection and giving help and advice to the public. These Wardens are people with a passion for the beach and are well aware that this is a pilot project and that their roles will develop to meet the needs that arise.

In addition, separate training from the LIFE programme, on environmental issues facing the beach and surrounds has been provided to the Wardens.

Their distinctive blue shirts will differentiate them from the Lifeguards. The Wardens are trained to the highest standards in emergency action and will assist Lifeguards in that capacity.

**Project Officer, Jessica Hodgson** explained the role of the new protectors of the sands. "In the past the Lifeguards on the beach have been distracted by having to deal with traffic issues, ambulances have been obstructed from getting onto the strand in emergency situations and

there has been a litter problem. Aside from being on hand to deal with these issues they will also be able to advise the public on tide times and wind direction, give people bags for their litter and inform other council services or the Gardai, if their services are required.

This is part of the pilot project for all beaches in the North West to promote safety and increase the use of these strands which are our richest sustainable resource. It is a joint cross border programme between Donegal County Council and Limavady Borough Council, funded by the special EU programme body. Rossnowlagh and Benone strand in Limavady are both working together to develop a programme that can be used on both beaches. They are both 'drive-on' beaches and they are both gorgeous with similar environmental issues.

The Beach Wardens are going to be the 'public face' of Donegal County Council and in doing so will be giving the Council a presence on the beach to ensure a safe and happy environment for everyone that uses Rossnowlagh beach".

Part of the programme was to send out over 6000 questionnaires to homes in the south of the county and results coming from this will help steer the duties of the wardens. The University of Ulster will analyse the result.

The Course was held at the Donegal Adventure Centre in Bundoran. The Centre provides training not only for Beach Wardens but also the RLSS National Beach Lifeguard Qualification, Life Support and First Aid; and other lifesaving and rescue awards and qualifications.

"Donegal Adventure Centre is an Approved Training Centre of **LIFEGUARDS IRELAND**. We have four RLSS Trainer Assessors here in the Centre, funded by Donegal Local development Company and if local people want people trained up to tackle beach issues in their area we are obviously delighted to be able to assist" said **Manager of the Centre, Niamh Hamill**.

*Adapted from an article written by Daniel Browne, Donegal Democrat 27/05/2004. Photograph courtesy Conor Sinclair, Donegal Town.*