

Update: Tributes paid to Suffolk firefighter Alan Soards who died while on training exercise at Olympic venue Lee Valley White Water Centre

http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/update_tributes_paid_to_suffolk_firefighter_alan_soards_who_died_while_on_training_exercise_at_olympic_venue_lee_valley_white_water_centre_1_1549203

03 October 2012 Lizzie Parry

AN INVESTIGATION is today under way after a Suffolk firefighter died while on a training exercise.

Alan Soards died during the water training course at Lea Valley White Water Centre yesterday, a Suffolk County Council spokeswoman confirmed.

Three ambulances and two air ambulances were sent to the scene at around 11.30am.

It is understood Mr Soards was taken ill while he was in the water but despite attempts by his firefighter colleagues and paramedics he died at the scene.

The 38-year-old, who had been a firefighter for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service for 11 years, had worked at Lowestoft South station.

Andy Fry, chief fire officer, said: "This is a devastating loss for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service.

"We are a small fire service where people tend to know each other well and Alan had been a firefighter with us for 11 years.

"My thoughts are with his family and loved ones at this extremely difficult time. "He was highly regarded by his colleagues - he was an experienced, extremely professional and capable firefighter. He loved his job and was well respected by those who worked with him, many of whom also considered Alan to be a close friend.

"I want to pay tribute to the firefighters from both Suffolk and Norfolk who were with Alan yesterday and to our colleagues in the other emergency services who fought so hard to save his life.



The Lee Valley White Water Centre near Broxbourne - where a Suffolk firefighter died during a training operation

"We have already started working very closely with colleagues from Hertfordshire Police and the Health and Safety Executive to establish full details of what led to Alan's untimely death.

"We are extremely grateful for the many offers of support and assistance received from fire service colleagues across the country and from the Chief Fire Officer's Association.

"In particular, we welcome the offer made to us by colleagues from Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and The Fire Brigades Union to provide support during the investigation."

East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST) spokesman Gary Sanderson said: "We were alerted at 11.32am to reports of a concern for welfare of a man at the Lee Valley White Water Centre on Station Road, Waltham Cross.

"We dispatched three ambulance resources and two air ambulance teams to the scene."

A spokesman for Lee Valley Regional Park Authority said: "Everyone at Lee Valley White Water Centre is very saddened about the news of firefighter Alan Soards's death yesterday and our thoughts are with Alan's family and friends.

"The incident took place during a Fire and Rescue Service training exercise on the Legacy Course – the smaller of the two courses at the centre. These training exercises have taken place regularly since the centre opened and are not related to our public canoeing or rafting activities."

UK Firefighter Dies During Water Rescue Training

[HTTP://WWW.FIREHOUSE.COM/NEWS/10797664/UK-FIREFIGHTER-DIES-DURING-WATER-RESCUE-TRAINING](http://www.firehouse.com/news/10797664/uk-firefighter-dies-during-water-rescue-training)

HAVERHILL ECHO ON OCT 3, 2012

The head of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service says the entire organisation is devastated by the tragic death of firefighter Alan Soards yesterday (Tuesday October 2).

Alan was at a fire service water rescue training course at Lee Valley White Water Centre when he was taken ill whilst in the water. Despite valiant attempts his firefighter colleagues and paramedics were unable to save his life.

Andy Fry, chief fire officer at Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, said: "Of course, our thoughts at this very sad time are with Alan's family and friends and also with his firefighter colleagues



Suffolk Firefighter Alan Soards

Photo credit: Courtesy Photo

who were with Alan at the time he was taken ill. Everyone has been stunned by these events.

"This is a devastating loss for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. We are a small fire service where people tend to know each other well and Alan had been a firefighter with us for over 11 years.

"Alan was just 38 years old and was a serving firefighter on white watch at Lowestoft South fire station.

"He was highly regarded by his colleagues - he was an experienced, extremely professional and capable firefighter. He loved his job and was well respected by those who worked with him, many of whom also considered Alan to be a close friend.

"I want to pay tribute to the firefighters from both Suffolk and Norfolk who were with Alan yesterday and to our colleagues in the other emergency services who fought so hard to save his life.

"We have already started working very closely with colleagues from Hertfordshire Police and the Health and Safety Executive to establish full details of what led to Alan's untimely death.

"We are extremely grateful for the many offers of support and assistance received from fire service colleagues across the country and from the Chief Fire Officer's Association.

"In particular, we welcome the offer made to us by colleagues from Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and The Fire Brigades Union to provide support during the investigation.

Lowestoft: Tributes to tragic firefighter Alan Soards who died during water training exercise at Lee Valley

http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/lowestoft_tributes_to_tragic_firefighter_alan_soards_who_died_during_water_training_exercise_at_lee_valley_1_1558648

October 2012 By Mark Boggis and Craig Robinson

TRIBUTES were last night paid to a dedicated firefighter who died during a training exercise at an Olympic venue.

People in Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth united to pay their respects to Alan Soards, 38, who was taken ill while in the water on a fire service exercise attended by Norfolk and Suffolk firefighters at the Lee Valley White Water Centre in Hertfordshire.

A full-time firefighter on white watch at Lowestoft South fire station for more than 11 years, Mr Soards was also part of the retained fire crew at the north Lowestoft

station. Before joining the fire service, he had spent "several years" as a volunteer crew member with the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston lifeboat and had devoted some of his spare time to delivering road safety presentations to teenage students at Lowestoft College and schools in Waveney.

Yesterday, flags were flying at half mast at the Lowestoft South fire station and the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston RNLi lifeboat station, where Mr Soards had served, and many shocked colleagues have been left devastated by the loss of a "close friend".



Firefighter Alan Soards

Suffolk's chief fire officer Andy Fry said the brigade was "devastated" by firefighter Soards' "tragic death" on Tuesday.

He said: "Alan was at a fire service water rescue training course at Lee Valley White Water Centre when he was taken ill while in the water. Despite valiant attempts, his firefighter colleagues and paramedics were unable to save his life. Of course, our thoughts at this very sad time are with Alan's family and friends and also with his firefighter colleagues who were with Alan at the time he was taken ill. Everyone has been stunned by these events."

A former Cliff Park High School pupil in Gorleston, Mr Soards gained a degree in applied physics at Coventry University, before he moved back to Gorleston. There he was a volunteer lifeboat crew member at Great Yarmouth and Gorleston RNLi lifeboat station.

Neal Duffield, lifeboat operations manager at Great Yarmouth and Gorleston RNLi lifeboat station, said: "It's always very sad when anyone who has committed their time and support to the RNLi passes away, and our thoughts are with Alan's family and friends at this sad time."

Mr Soards, who lived in Oulton, had to give up his role as helmsman on the lifeboat to be closer to his work as a fireman. David Grief, a retired Gorleston lifeboatman, worked with Mr Soards and described himself as the 38-year-old's "honorary uncle".

Mr Grief, 71, said: "He was on the lifeboat quite a long time and was a respected crew member, everybody liked him." He added Mr Soards' death had left a "big hole" among the community where he was "incredibly well known" and said friends were shocked by the tragedy.

Mr Fry added: "Alan was an experienced, extremely professional and capable firefighter. He loved his job and was well respected by those who worked with him, many of whom also considered Alan to be a close friend."

The Lee Valley White Water Centre hosted canoe events during the London games. The fire crews were using the smaller of the two courses at the centre on Tuesday. Investigations were continuing into his death yesterday with a post mortem examination due to be held.

A book of condolence will be available for members of the public to sign at the Lowestoft South fire station in Stradbroke Road from 10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday.

Suffolk firefighter Alan Soards' full honours funeral

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-20094579>

26 October 2012 From the section [England](#)

A "strong, brave and generous" Suffolk firefighter who died on a training exercise has been given a fire service funeral with full honours.

Alan Soards, 38, a member of white watch at Lowestoft South fire station, died at the Lee Valley White Water Centre in Hertfordshire on 2 October.

Jackie and Michael Soards said their son, of Oulton Broad, was "always talking about how great his job was".

A service for Norfolk-born Mr Soards was held in Gorleston earlier.

He was taken ill in the water during routine swimming exercise as part of his swift water rescue training at Lee Valley.

He never boasted about his awards and achievements in fact, had he not died, we probably would never have known about them ~

Michael and Jackie Soards, Parents of firefighter Alan Soards



Alan Soards also taught schoolchildren fire and road safety

The fire service said he was immediately rescued by his colleagues but died within a few minutes.

Representatives from every fire and rescue service in the country have been invited to the funeral at St Andrew's

Church in Gorleston-on-Sea, the town where Mr Soards grew up.

His coffin was carried from his fire station on a restored fire engine, and a piper led pallbearers into the church through a Guard of Honour of firefighters and standard bearers.

Mr Soards - "Knuckles" to his colleagues - was a respected and much-loved firefighter for 11 years, the fire service said.

He had also volunteered for many years as a crew member of the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston RNLI.

In a statement, Jackie and Michael Soards said: "Alan was a strong, brave, generous, non-materialistic and honest man.

"He lived to clearly defined and strongly held no-nonsense values.

"If something interested him he threw his heart and soul into it."

'Made us laugh'

They added Mr Soards, who had a degree in applied physics from Coventry University, loved extreme sports and his dog Tyson was his "pride and joy".

"[He was] always talking about how great his job was and what he was going to do next; making us laugh about the funny things that happened.

"He never boasted about his awards and achievements. In fact, had he not died, we probably would never have known about them.

"He died doing what he loved, surrounded by people whom he cared about and respected.

"We now know that feeling was reciprocated."

Neil Henderson, the watch commander who oversaw white watch, said: "Alan loved nothing more than being with his fire service friends, whether it was hurtling down a fast moving river, driving the flood rescue boats or instructing kids in road safety and fitness.

"Al was a first class firefighter and friend.

"We will all miss him dearly and will always treasure the banter we had, and the memories."

Firefighter drowned during training exercise at Olympic white water rafting venue moments after he ate a McDonald's breakfast meal

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2350810/Firefighter-drowned-training-exercise-Olympic-white-water-rafting-venue-moments-ate-McDonalds-breakfast-meal.html>

28 June 2013 | **UPDATED:** 11:44 EST, 28 June 2013 By Harriet Arkell

- **Alan Soards, 38, got into trouble in the water and vomited up his breakfast**
- **Lowestoft firefighter was on training day at Lee Valley White Water Centre**
- **Inquest heard Mr Soards vomited his breakfast while being given CPR**
- **Colleague had joked with him earlier that he would 'see his breakfast later'**
- **Hertfordshire coroner records cardiac respiratory failure as cause of death**

A firefighter died during a water rescue exercise at an Olympic venue after choking on a McDonald's breakfast he'd eaten earlier, an inquest heard.

Alan Soards, 38, was on a training day with three colleagues from Suffolk Fire and Rescue at the Lee Valley White Water Centre in Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire, when the accident happened.

The men were doing 'passive' swims - letting the current carry them down the course - to practise flood rescues when Mr Soards, from Lowestoft, got into trouble.

The experienced firefighter, who was described by a colleague as a strong swimmer, got into trouble when the difficulty level increased and he needed to swim more aggressively to keep his head above water.

The inquest at the Old Courthouse in Hatfield heard that Mr Soards missed the first safe area, away from the fast-flowing water, where he was supposed to stop.

Witnesses said Mr Soards, who was also a lifeboat volunteer, looked out of breath and that his face had turned purple, and he was found face-down in the water at the end of the course.



Mr Soards was experienced, fit and healthy and had no medical problems, the inquest into his death heard



Tragic accident: Alan Soards, 38, died after inhaling his own vomit during a water rescue course in east London

He was pulled from the water and attempts were made to resuscitate him, but Mr Soards vomited his undigested McDonald's breakfast while he was being given CPR.

He was pronounced dead at the scene 45 minutes later.

Mr Soards' colleague Peter Brown told the inquest he knew something was wrong as soon as the firefighter was pulled from the water.

Mr Brown said: 'He was a big, thick-set chap and was a powerful swimmer.

'You could see something was wrong. His jaw was locked and he was struggling to breathe. He was a purple colour.

'He was staring. It was haunting.'

Mr Brown also revealed he had joked with Mr Soards about him throwing up the McDonald's breakfast he had eaten shortly before the exercise.

He said: 'I joked 'You will be seeing that in the next half-an-hour'.'

Pathologist Dr Waria Mohammed told the inquest that a post-mortem examination showed Mr Soards had inhaled his own vomit.

The inquest also heard that there were no defibrillators at the centre - which could have been used to resuscitate Mr Soards safely.

Recording a narrative verdict, Coroner for

Hertfordshire Edward Thomas recorded cardiac respiratory failure as the cause of death and said that 'aspiration of gastric contents' had contributed to his death.

The coroner said: 'The verdict is that he died whilst undertaking swift water rescue training.

Mr Thomas said he would write to the Department for Communities and Local Government to suggest defibrillators be made available as a matter of course.

Mr Soards, who was based at Lowestoft South fire station and was not married but leaves his parents and sister, had no history of medical problems.

The accident happened while officers, jointly with a team from Norfolk Fire and Rescue, were practising flood rescues on the centre's Legacy Course.



Mr Soards, pictured on another occasion, was doing a series of 'passive swims' when he got into trouble

The 160m course is fast flowing Grade Three white water, which means it is full of waves, drops and powerful constrictions designed for canoeists to paddle round.

Canoeists are only allowed on the course once they have completed a competency assessment.

The £31 million Lee Valley White Water Centre was built for the 2012 London Olympics and officially opened in 2010.



The accident happened at the Lee Valley White Water Centre, which was built for the 2012 Olympics (file pic)



<https://www.gowhitewater.co.uk/>