Dr John Higgie, Minehead Lifeboat

The 24-hour Volunteer

Dr John Higgie is one of 3,000 volunteers who ensure Britain's RNLI lifeboats are ready to put to sea 24 hours a day.

John, a general practitioner in Minehead, Somerset, is the Local Operations Manager at the town's lifeboat station, where a 20-strong pool of crew members use two boats to maintain rescue cover along a 25-mile stretch of the Somerset and Exmoor coastline.

He is on continuous call to respond to launch requests from coastguards; to authorise the boats to launch; to monitor operations while they are at sea; and at the conclusion of each operation to ensure the station is immediately readyed for when the next call comes, day or night.

It makes demands on his already busy schedule. But John is no stranger to having to sacrifice leisure and family time: before he stepped up to his current post he was a member of the crew and responded to dozens of calls himself.

John says volunteering for the RNLI brings immense satisfaction.

"Nearly every call involves helping people who have got into trouble, and the look of relief on their faces when a lifeboat arrives more than repays all the effort, the training, and the risks inevitably involved in putting to sea in bad weather," he said.

"The RNLI builds the finest and safest lifeboats in the world for its 4,600 crewmen and its budget – unsupported by Government – is £150 million a year."

"If it had to pay those crewmen – and those of us shoreside – the costs would be unsustainably high."

"In other words it's only volunteering that keeps the lifeboats afloat and saving lives at sea: what greater incentive could there be to get involved?"