

## NUMBER OF DROWNINGS RISE IN 2011

Water Safety New Zealand today announced that there had been a total of 12 drowning deaths recorded for the month of April. The national organisation responsible for water safety education has also released cumulative figures for the first four months of the year which show a rise in drowning numbers in 2011 in comparison with recent years. The 57 drowning deaths in New Zealand from January through April represent the worst start to a year since 1997, and are well above the most recent 5 year average (2006 - 2010) of 43.

Alan Muir, Executive Director, Water Safety New Zealand remarks, "A poor month in April has contributed to a 30% increase in drowning fatalities when matched against the first four months of 2010. Whether this represents an anomaly or a more sinister trend is impossible to say at this stage, but 57 deaths in 4 months are not acceptable."

WSNZ's internationally recognised integrated drowning database, DrownBase™, classifies drowning incidents into one of 3 categories. In 2011 there have been 27 Recreational, 12 Non-Recreational (when the victim had no intention of being in the water for recreational purposes) and 16 Other (activities such as road vehicle and suicide). In addition to these fatalities there have been 2 deaths where the primary activity is yet to be classified by a Coroner.

Muir comments, "What is interesting when examining the data is that the averages for both Recreational and Non-Recreational drownings in 2011 are tracking very close to their respective average numbers over the last 5 years. Recreational drownings average 28 (2006–2010) and Non-Recreational, 10 (2006-2010). It is the classification titled 'Other' where we have seen a staggering increase with 16 recorded to date in 2011 against a 5 year average of 6 (2006-2010). Road vehicle and suicides incidents typically cannot be influenced by water safety education. However, when discussing Recreational and Non-Recreational incidents, education is essential to give people the skills they need to enjoy aquatic environments and activities safely."

Major contributors towards the Recreational Activity toll of 27 have been: swimming (10), underwater - dive / snorkel (5), recreational boating (6) and angling (3).

Muir comments, "Invariably the actions of the victims have contributed to their own demise in these incidents. Whether it is by ignoring the most obvious of safety considerations or not recognising their own limitations, many in this group made a poor decision that cost them their lives."

11 accidental immersions have also blighted the start of the 2011. Particularly tragic are the 6 cases where unsupervised young children have gained access to the water and, before a parent or caregiver is aware of the danger, the child is lost.

To date 79% of all drownings in 2011 have been male.

Ends...

**For more information or interview contact:**

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**WATER SAFETY NEW ZEALAND**

Formed in 1949, WSNZ is the national organisation responsible for water safety education in New Zealand.

WSNZ manages drowning prevention and water safety in communities through education. WSNZ administers proven, proactive and preventative education interventions. WSNZ leads the Learn to Swim and Survive sector in New Zealand. The Sealord Swim For Life initiative is WSNZ's major project. WSNZ seeks to address a dramatic decline in swimming ability of our youth. Sealord Swim For Life is a comprehensive national project established to:

- Provide all children with access to the water;
- Facilitate the delivery of quality swim and survive programmes in primary schools;
- Provide the foundations for the development of a culture that produces generations of New Zealand families that are water safe.

