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Media Release
For Immediate Release



Drowning Deaths Soar Beyond 2010 Total

90 people have now drowned in New Zealand in 2011. Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) has today announced the provisional year-to-date statistics. This is a significant announcement as the nation's drowning toll for year to date now eclipses the total figure for all of 2010 (87).

The latest incident involved a 39 year old male, at Maruia Falls near Murchison.

Matt Claridge, General Manager WSNZ, says, "To have surpassed the total number of drownings recorded for all of 2010 by the end of September 2011 is cause for real concern. What is particularly tragic is that we know most of the deaths by drowning could have been avoided through a positive mix of appropriate supervision of young children, greater awareness of water safety as a serious issue for all communities, and by ensuring that our youth have the opportunity to learn to swim and survive."

Our record in terms of drowning is an unenviable one. Drowning is the third highest cause of unintentional death in New Zealand. New Zealand's current drowning toll is 2.7 deaths per 100,000 which, when compared with other developed countries, is abysmal. The USA has a current rate of 1.3 per 100,000.

"Despite gains made in the last 30 years, the USA example shows how poor our record actually is." states Claridge.

Analysis of year to date data for 2011 against that recorded for 2010 indicates where the increases in drownings are occurring. Off shore incidents have more than doubled from six in total last year to 13 currently. Likewise, underwater incidents have twice the number of fatalities, four in 2010 and eight to date in 2011. Perhaps the most disturbing statistic is an increase in pre-schooler drownings which has risen from 6 six for last year to 11 this year. Both Maori and Asian ethnic groups are also contributing to the bad year. In 2010 Maori totalled 15 drownings, this number now stands at 20 in 2011. Those of Asian ethnicity are also suffering this year, six Asians drowned in 2010 compared with 13 so far this year.

Claridge offers this sobering forecast: “With summer fast approaching, the drowning toll is sure to rise further. Enjoying all things aquatic is part of our way of life in New Zealand. This is something we rightly celebrate; but failure to adhere to common sense behavior in many cases has resulted in the position we are faced with today.”

Claridge concludes, “This summer our advice is simple: make the safety of all involved a priority. In terms of specifics, boaties and fisherman must check that the marine weather forecast supports the intended trip, life jackets should be worn at all times and ensure reliable communications equipment is carried. Divers, always dive with a buddy, plan your dive and dive your plan. And for parents of young children, active supervision, **within sight and reach of your child**, is paramount. We would encourage these parents to take the opportunities available to them over the summer to start the water safety education process; knowing the basics will enhance their child’s experiences in the water and make a big difference towards them ultimately learning to swim confidently and competently.”

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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 the delivery of education based drowning prevention and water safety initiatives into communities.

WSNZ is the lead agency for Swim and Survive activity 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;
- Manage 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.

For more information go to www.sealordswimforlife.org.nz