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Media Release

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Water Safety New Zealand Warns Against a Repeat of History

With Christmas upon us, it brings with it the traditional time for holidays and relaxing with family and friends. However, for 10 families this year, the Christmas holiday period will mark the first anniversary of a drowning tragedy that took from them a loved spouse, child or sibling.

Matt Claridge, General Manager, Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) explains "Over the official holiday period last year, 10 drowning deaths were recorded in 10 days. For those connected with the victims, Christmas will forever be tainted by tragedy and loss."

Drowning data highlights the holiday period as a time of year for which a peak in water based incidents and drowning fatalities occurs. While this can, to a degree, be attributed to the warmer weather combined with the long awaited holidays, WSNZ is concerned that other factors are contributing.

"As we move into holiday mode and unwind, many of us who would normally act responsibly let our guard down. Relaxed attitudes can lead to carelessness and poor decision making which inevitably contribute to drowning incidents at this time of year."

Claridge is insistent that safety must be a priority for all to enjoy aquatic activities.

"Every year we see the same mistakes being made. New Zealanders need to understand that water can be unforgiving. It only takes one error in judgement to directly contribute to, or create, a chain reaction which can end in disaster. With appropriate planning and careful consideration of potential dangers much of the associated risk is removed from activities on the water."

Key messages from WSNZ for an enjoyable summer in, on or around the water are targeted at swimmers, boaties and fishermen.

Claridge states, "People engaging in these activities must take responsibility for their actions. Swimmers should never enter the water alone, be aware of their limitations and always swim in designated areas. Boaties and fishermen need to ensure the weather and outlook is suitable for the planned trip and that they carry the necessary safety gear, specifically life jackets and communication equipment".

As well as these messages, WSNZ points out that this is also the ideal time for parents and caregivers to provide positive instruction for children in their care on appropriate behaviour around the water.

Claridge continues, “Whilst remembering that supervising children around water is fundamental and of paramount importance, the summer holidays provide great opportunities to educate our kids on enjoying the water safely. Parents should actively participate with their kids in aquatic based activities, take time to point out potential dangers, explain safety rules, and provide sufficient opportunities for safe, supervised and fun water experiences”.

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