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Media Release

For immediate release



LOWEST EVER ANNUAL DROWNING TOLL RECORDED IN 2010

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) has announced that there was a total of 86 drowning deaths in New Zealand in 2010. This is the lowest recorded annual drowning toll since records began in 1980.

The number is well down on the 5 year average for drownings of 111 (2005-2009) and 7 below the previous lowest ever recorded toll of 93 in 2006.

Matt Claridge, General Manager, WSNZ acknowledges that any reduction in the number of annual drownings is positive but believes that 86 deaths leaves little cause for celebration.

“Drowning continues to be the third highest cause of accidental death in New Zealand, behind road vehicle crashes and falls. Despite the record low annual toll and a dramatic reduction when compared with historical statistics that peaked at over 200 deaths in the mid eighties, the fact is that too many New Zealanders continue to needlessly lose their lives in and around the water.”

All drowning incidents in New Zealand are captured by DrownBase™, an internationally recognised integrated drowning database managed by WSNZ. When recording and analysing data with regards to ‘Activity’ at the time of death, WSNZ classifies drowning incidents into one of three categories – Recreational, Non Recreational and Other Activity.

Recreational activities are those where the person intended to be in the water for recreational purposes, e.g. Fishing, Sailing, Swimming and Diving. Non Recreational is where the person had no intention of being in the water for recreational purposes, e.g. Immersion Incidents and Occupational Related drownings. Other Activity



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includes Suicide, Homicide and Road Vehicle incidents.

Claridge comments, “In 2010 there were 48 Recreational drownings, 18 Non Recreational drownings and 20 recorded as Other Activities. Given that 23% of all drowning are attributed to ‘Other Activity’ and that we have very limited ability to positively influence change in this area, continued emphasis and focus must be on the 66 deaths occurring as a result of recreational and non-recreational activity. Some drownings are tragic accidents but most are due to poor decision making or the failure to follow the most basic of safety precautions.”

While not quite in celebratory mood Claridge does highlight a couple of positive improvements for 2010.

“For the period 2005-2009, Maori on average contributed to 23% of all drownings, however in 2010 this figure has dropped to 17%. Likewise, immersion incidents have dropped from a 5 year average of 31 to 18 in 2010. These improvements along with reductions in diving and fishing incidents have largely been responsible for the lower toll we have witnessed in 2010.”

Environmentally, rivers continue to be the most prolific site for drowning incidents. In 2010 29 people lost their lives in rivers; when combined with beaches (18) and tidal waters (16), these 3 environments account for 73% of all drownings.

Other information released by WSNZ shows males lead females with a ratio of 3:1 for drowning in 2010, a figure which has remained consistent for as long as records have been kept. Not surprisingly, the summer months continue to be the primary season for drowning – the 3 months of December, January and February of 2010 accounted for 42% of all drownings.

Ends...

Attachment

1. 2010 Drowning Report (Provisional)



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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 targets drowning prevention and water safety in communities through education. WSNZ oversees proven, proactive and preventative education interventions. In addition, WSNZ prioritizes leadership, collaboration and enabling the water safety sector with resourcing, research, planning and communication.

WSNZ is the lead agency for 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. The Sealord Swim For Life initiative is an overarching, 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.

