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Media Release

For immediate release



EIGHT TO DROWN AGAIN THIS HOLIDAY PERIOD?

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) today urged New Zealanders to “take responsibility around water” to keep the holiday period drowning toll down.

“The official holiday period typically coincides with a peak in drownings and water based incidents resulting in serious injury. Last year eight people lost their lives between 4pm on Christmas Eve and 6am on the 5th of January; the previous year it was 13 deaths for the same period,” explains WSNZ General Manager, Matt Claridge.

The average New Zealander’s strong desire to enjoy the water gives relevance to the message communicated by the organisation, especially during summer. Whether boating, swimming or spending the day at the beach, it’s everyone’s responsibility to enjoy the water safely.

“The Christmas holiday period is special to New Zealanders who make the most of their time off and naturally head to the water. People want to pack a lot of action into a couple of weeks and what we are saying is that the majority of aquatic based incidents can be avoided with good planning and sensible behaviour.”

Claridge expects that it will be boaties, fisherman and divers who will dominate the headlines this summer should they choose to ignore basic safety considerations. Life jackets, communications equipment and suitable weather conditions are common sense precautions prior to any trip; failure to ensure that these basic requirements are met will put lives at risk. Swimmers also need to take into account all relevant potential hazards when swimming in moving or unfamiliar water and make decisions accordingly on whether it is safe to continue... if in doubt, stay out.



Claridge concludes with a message for parents and caregivers of young children: “Children must be actively supervised at all times in and around the water. Supervision without distraction and compromise is often easier said than done. Parents must consciously and actively supervise children and be ready to help. I encourage parents to use this time together to teach their children some rules and basic water safety skills to help keep them safe”.

The December drowning toll for 2010 currently stands at 9, already only 1 below the 5 year average for the full month at 10.

Ends...

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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.

