

## **DEADLY HOLIDAY PERIOD FOR AQUATIC INCIDENTS**

Ten drownings over the official Xmas and New Year holiday period is a tragic yet sadly predictable figure according to Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ). Ten drownings for the period is three more than the five year average (2005/2006 – 2009/2010) of seven drowning fatalities.

“A lot of attention is paid to the road toll but drownings also peak during this time of year and, given the number of incidents where good fortune has contributed to survival, we are lucky that the number of drownings has not in fact surpassed road deaths,” comments Matt Claridge, General Manager, WSNZ.

WSNZ is concerned that in the majority of cases lives have been lost because of the failure to follow the most basic of safety precautions and, with the bulk of the summer period still to come, are reiterating the need for safe and responsible behaviour in and around the water at all times.

“Some drownings are tragic accidents but most are due to poor decision making. People must take responsibility for their safety and act accordingly. Water safety often comes down to using common sense, life jackets being worn in boats and constant supervision of young children around water are obvious measures to reduce risk yet people choose to ignore these facts and consequently they are gambling with their lives.”

The bulk of incidents this holiday period have been recreational based with all but one of the drownings occurring in the North Island - four have been in the Waikato region. Recreational fatalities consist of four incidents linked to diving or shell fish gathering, a 68 year old fisherman whose boat was swamped on the Coromandel

Coast and who was not wearing a life jacket, two swimmers, one in the Waikato River and another in a Nelson swimming pool.

Non-recreational incidents include two immersion incidents involving pre-school children: one in a home pool and another in a river environment. The latest death, a woman in her seventies, was found floating in a west Auckland river yesterday and is potentially another unintentional immersion incident.

All aquatic based activity carries some sort of risk and it is each individual's choice as to how they deal with this risk. While many would consider risk taking part of the New Zealand psyche, Claridge says there is no room for bravado or macho type behaviour when recreating in and around the water where a fun outing can turn into a potentially tragic incident in a matter of seconds.

“Xmas 2010 has been forever tainted with tragedy for ten families this year and that is ten too many. I urge all people to consider safety as their first priority when enjoying the water. Always ensure the environmental conditions are suitable for the activity planned and comply with all rules and guidelines around safe participation. Should there be any doubt about your ability to stay safe then you must reconsider your plans.”

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.

