

TWO PRE-SCHOOL DROWNING TRAGEDIES IN SEPTEMBER

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) today released year to date drowning statistics. There were five drownings in September which brings this year's national toll to 59 well below the five year average of 75 for the first nine months of the year. (2005-2009).

"Drownings this year are tracking favourably in comparisons with recent years but September was blighted by two separate incidents which resulted in the death of 15 and 20 month old pre-schoolers" comments Matt Claridge, General Manager, Water Safety New Zealand.

Water presents a potentially life threatening hazard for young children in and around the home and in the wider community a fact supported by statistics which show pre-school children have one of the highest drowning rates of all New Zealanders. A lack of supervision is the common factor in drowning incidents of young children

Claridge continues "incidents involving pre-schoolers are avoidable, appropriate supervision is absolutely paramount, it takes only a minute for pre-schoolers to fall into the water and drown, parents and caregivers will not know their child is in trouble unless they are watching them".

The issue of appropriate supervision is the basis for a partnership between WSNZ and Plunket. Together the organisations have developed a campaign that communicates to all new parents and caregivers about the importance of water safety for young children with emphasis on active supervision to prevent drowning. The goal of the campaign is the elimination of drowning incidents involving pre-schoolers but has wider reaching benefits. It provides a platform for continued water safety education and encourages parents to not only protect their child but promotes the value of positive experiences for children while teaching them to behave safely and responsibly in and around water.

Claridge states “WSNZ’s role is to lead water safety education in New Zealand. To effectively reduce our high annual drowning toll we must establish a water safety culture across all communities. We need to start early in the life cycle and ensure that children are provided with ongoing education that will give them the skills they require to enjoy the water safely”.

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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 Swim and Survive sector in New Zealand. The Swim For Life initiative WSNZ’s major project. WSNZ seeks to address a dramatic decline in swimming ability of our youth. The 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.