

MINDLESS BEHAVIOUR DRIVES DROWNING TOLL HIGHER

Eleven drowning fatalities recorded in October have driven the national drowning toll for the ten months of 2011 to 102, reports Water Safety New Zealand.

Five net fishing drownings, two underwater (snorkelling), one accidental immersion of a pre-schooler in a home pool environment, one fisherman in a small boat and two probable suicides account for the eleven deaths.

Matt Claridge, CEO, WSNZ comments, "This month's drowning fatalities really stress how unforgiving any aquatic environment can be to those who do not show it the appropriate respect or behave in an unsafe manner. Nine of the incidents simply did not need to happen if those involved had acted appropriately and taken responsibility for their own safety and for the safety of those they were with at the time."

The fishing incidents (five killed drag netting at river mouths) and the capsizing of a small boat (no life jacket) had an almost inevitable conclusion, states Claridge: "Three fishing related incidents for six lives lost, and why? I have no doubt the victims were aware of the danger they were placing themselves in but they put the desire to go fishing ahead of what should be common sense. It's likely, given the age of the victims, they had undertaken similar activity literally hundreds of times and got away with it, but this time they didn't. That's why we emphasise the importance of safety as the first priority for all water based activity. At some point something untoward or unexpected will happen. If you've neglected basic safety considerations you are increasing the likelihood of an otherwise minor event escalating into something tragic."

The organisation is also disappointed about the factors around the two fatal snorkelling incidents and the pre-school drowning in a home pool.

The snorkelling incidents had the common factor of snorkelling buddies entering the water together but becoming separated; rather than rejoin, they continued on their own and broke

one of the cardinal rules associated with this activity which is to always dive with a buddy and stay with them for the duration of the dive. Subsequently the victim has got into trouble and no assistance was available.

The home pool drowning is a continuation of the horrific toll on the pre-school age group; the causal factor again, as with the vast majority of drowning involving this age group, was that a young child gained unsupervised access to a potential water hazard.

Claridge concludes, "It is evident that a proportion of the population either believe themselves to be above the rules that apply to safe aquatic activity or consider they are somehow immune from the risk. If they do not value their own lives perhaps they need to consider the impact their behaviour has on family members and friends who are left behind. Whatever their motivation, the fact is if we do not see a shift in attitudes the nation will continue to be faced with an ever increasing annual drowning toll."

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.
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Our Way Of Life: National Water Safety Communications Campaign

TVNZ and New Zealand Post have partnered with WSNZ to deliver a water safety communications campaign across New Zealand.

'Our Way of Life' is the campaign theme.

Our Way of Life communicates that New Zealanders, by virtue of who we are and where we live, are predisposed to enjoying aquatic based activities and environments. The objective of the campaign is to encourage participation in all things aquatic, the associated benefits of this, but with the underlying message that all aquatic activity requires that safety is the first priority.

