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Media Release
For immediate release



Pre-School Drowning Record Miserable

Another fatal drowning incident involving a pre-school aged child has driven the year to date toll for this age group to 12. Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) is concerned at the high toll and makes an impassioned plea to parents and caregivers to supervise small children vigilantly.

The latest incident involved a 4 year old Waikato boy who drowned in a home swimming pool while visiting family in Auckland over the school holidays.

Matt Claridge, WSNZ Chief Executive, comments, "It is frustrating and difficult to believe that New Zealanders are not aware of the significant hazard that water can present for small children in and around the home. These incidents continue to occur at a shockingly high rate, all of which are preventable."

The dramatic rise in preschool drownings in 2011 prompted WSNZ to conduct a review to consider the circumstances surrounding all preschool drowning deaths in the last five years. The review involved representatives from Plunket, SafeKids, the Child Youth and Mortality Committee, WSNZ and Ian Hassall (a child safety and public policy expert). It examined current prevention strategies and sought to identify enhancements and/or changes in an attempt to prevent any further drowning of this age group.

"The time it takes for young children to get into trouble is remarkably short, a matter of seconds. Evidence suggests that around 71% of infant drowning deaths occur because of a breakdown in supervision. Supervision incorporates three variables: attention, proximity and continuity. Therefore the importance of the "active supervision" message and the understanding of what this means is absolutely critical for parents and caregivers of young children," says Claridge.



Active supervision is described by WSNZ as:

‘Being in the line of sight with the ability to provide immediate assistance’

“It’s a straightforward message: if your child has access to the water, then you as the parent, or a designated responsible adult, must make safety the first priority - always be within sight and reach and ready to intervene if required.”

Further analysis of the statistical information available to WSNZ reveals that the home environment, in its broadest sense, presents the greatest risk environment for pre-schoolers; with the home pool the most prominent at risk area.

While active supervision is critical during any form of aquatic based activity, the members of the review panel agreed that 100% active supervision of children in the home environment is desired, but in all probability difficult to achieve. Therefore the provision of a safe home environment is a mandatory, complimentary measure.

“Parents need to act now and ensure the home environment is ‘watersafe’ for pre-schoolers, both inside and out. The most effective way to protect your child in and around the home is to have a fully fenced area where your child can play without the threat of water hazards. If this is not feasible then all potential water hazards must be identified and eliminated from the home environment. This will include the removal of any container that could contain water, fixing of any property drainage issues and, of course, if you have a swimming or spa pool, ensuring compliance with NZS 8500: 2006 Safety Barriers and Fences around Swimming Pools, Spa Pools and Hot Tubs. Should any hazard be irremovable then it must be isolated to a degree that makes it impossible for a young child to gain unsupervised access,” says Claridge.

In addition to the home environment, WSNZ warns parents not to let their guard down when visiting rivers, beaches or public pool facilities. This position has been emphasised as recently as 2 November 2011 with findings released by Coroner Peter Ryan who stated a lack of supervision by a two year old’s parents resulted in her death at a public swimming facility earlier this year. The fatal incident served as a reminder for parents to "actively and closely supervise young children at swimming pools, even if the pool complex provides lifeguards.”



WSNZ will continue to work in partnership with Plunket to deliver the supervision message to parents at the five month Well Child check. In addition, WSNZ will launch a public awareness campaign in December, delivering the supervision message direct to parents via a television advertisement. The advertisement is a component of the national 'Our Way of Life' communications campaign that has been developed in partnership with TVNZ and NZ Post. The campaign has a theme of celebrating our nation's affinity with the water while clearly communicating that all aquatic activity requires that safety is the first priority.

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For more information or interview contact:

Matt Claridge

WSNZ Chief Executive

Phone: (04) 801 9600

Mobile: (027) 478 1836

Email: matt@watersafety.org.nz

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.

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.

