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Media Release

For immediate release



2008 Drowning Report

There were a total of 96 drowning deaths in New Zealand in 2008. Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) has today officially announced the annual drowning toll. It follows one of the highest holiday period drowning tolls in recent time.

2008 is the second lowest annual toll since records began in 1980. In comparison to 10 years ago, there were 148 drowning deaths in 1998.

All drowning incidents in New Zealand are captured by DrownBase™, WSNZ manages DrownBase™ recognised internationally as the leader in integrated drowning databases.

The average annual drowning toll for the five year period (2003 – 2007) is 114.

The 2008 toll equates to 2.4 drowning deaths per capita (100,000). Drowning is the third highest cause of accidental death in New Zealand, behind road vehicle crashes and falls. Even with a reduction in 2008, New Zealand's drowning toll is still twice that of Australia on a per capita basis.

There were 60 *Recreational* related drowning deaths in 2008, 63% of the total toll. On average (2003 – 2007) there are 52 *Recreational* drowning deaths per annum at 46% of the total toll. This is an increase of 17% over the five year (2003 – 2007) average.

There were 29 (30%) *Non-Recreational* drowning deaths in 2008. *Non-Recreational* drowning incidents are when the victim had no intention of being in the water for recreational purposes.

In addition, there were seven (7%) *Other* drowning deaths from activities such as *Road Vehicle* and *Suicide*. The five year average (2003 – 2007) is 29 (26%). *Other* drowning deaths include *Other Commercial*, *Road Vehicle* and *Suicide*. These drowning incidents typically cannot be influenced by water safety education.



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When *Other* drownings are excluded from analysis, the remaining toll equals 89 drowning deaths. In effect the drowning toll for 2008 has increased, as the five year average (2003 – 2007) is 84 drowning deaths per annum for total *Recreational* and *Non-Recreational* incidents.

WSNZ General Manager, Matt Claridge says “on the face of things there is a reduction in total drownings, but once we look at the actual number of drownings that can be influenced by water safety education, then the toll has increased. The large numbers of recreational drownings indicate New Zealanders have a lack of ability and knowledge to enjoy the water safely. Recreational drowning incidents are preventable.”

“The 2008 toll supports recent analysis by WSNZ that indicates the drowning toll will rise back to the horrific levels of the 1980’s. Unless New Zealand children learn to swim whilst at school, generation after generation will continually be exposed to a higher risk of drowning. As we know, aquatic activity is diverse and evolving constantly. We also know that 25% of children are unable to get across 25m or manage to keep afloat and tread water. Not enough to suggest they have the skills to save themselves.”

Claridge concludes “Swim and survival skills are the first step to preventing drowning. Parents need to understand the importance of children learning to swim, but it shouldn’t be a cost based issue. All New Zealand children should learn to swim whilst at school. To achieve this, children must be able to access a pool, school teachers must be trained to teach swim and survival skills and the curriculum must recognise the ability to swim as an outcome.”

“It would be unfortunate if New Zealanders continue to drown as generation after generation is lost, due to the lack of real emphasis on development of swim and survival skills.”

...Ends...

See attached for:

1. 2008 Drowning Report

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