

10 March 2008

Media Release

For immediate release



Summer's Dangerous Waters

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) has released the drowning statistics for the month of February. There were eight drowning deaths in New Zealand during February. The year to date drowning toll is 31.

For the summer period (December 2008 – February 2009) there were 39 drowning deaths. The average for drowning deaths during summer (last five years) is 42. In summer of 1999/2000 there were 60 drowning deaths. The most recent lowest summer toll is 29 from 2000/01.

Recent drowning reports have highlighted the high percentage of *Recreational* deaths compared with *Non Recreational* incidents. Annual statistics (last five years) show: 48% of all drowning deaths are *Recreational*. This predictably increases during the summer months to an average (last five years) of 56%. In comparison this year, a disturbingly high 77% of all summer drowning deaths were *Recreational* based i.e. the victim was in the water for recreational purposes at the time of death.

WSNZ general manager, Matt Claridge comments; “not surprisingly a surge in aquatic activity occurs over the summer months, from which we always see an increase in drowning deaths and injuries reported. However, it is of major concern that the percentage of *Recreational* drowning incidents has risen so sharply of late.”

“Water safety education has a major role to play in reducing the incidence of drowning in New Zealand over the long term. Popular activities are creating greater challenges to those involved in drowning prevention, in part because of a decline in water safety skills. It seems illogical that most New Zealand children don't learn to swim at school. The development of swim and survival techniques are foundation water safety skills that regrettably all New Zealanders do not learn.”

10 of the summer fatalities occurred whilst swimming. Five of which were at Surf Beaches of which three were a result of being caught in a rip. Another 10 deaths were the result of either fishing or seafood gathering including Rock Fishing, Snorkelling and Shellfishing.



Claridge concludes: "The rising trend in Recreational deaths is a point for focussing future efforts. New Zealanders need to understand that if they are going to partake in aquatic activities, then they must be suitably trained to do so. They must have the skills and knowledge to enjoy the water safely. This includes the ability to swim and survive and for example having completed a Coastguard Boating Education course before boating."

...Ends...

For more information or interview contact:

Matt Claridge

General Manager

Phone: 04 801 9600

Mobile: 027 478 1836

Email: matt@watersafety.org.nz