



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Justice
BC Coroners Service

BC Coroners Service urges water safety

VICTORIA –With the promise of another sizzling summer weekend ahead, the BC Coroners Service is warning residents and visitors to take extra care when enjoying water-based activities, be it at lakes, rivers, pools or the seashore.

In the past five days, coroners in B.C. have begun investigations into four drowning deaths, reinforcing Coroners Service statistics that show a high percentage of drownings in B.C. occur in the summer months of May through August.

The four deaths occurred in different parts of B.C. and encompass four entirely different sets of circumstances – a three-year-old child in a backyard swimming pool, a teenager who slipped and fell while playing at the top of a waterfall, a middle-aged man tubing on a fast-running river and another man who died in a swimming incident in an Interior lake.

The variety of cases shows the many dangers that water can hold and thus the need for extra vigilance whether swimming, boating or even just walking along the edge of a body of water.

A review of drowning deaths over the past five years shows that many victims are unfamiliar with the waters involved and therefore don't see the risk or underestimate it. Those risks can include such things as unexpected currents, steep and sudden drop offs, or unusually high water levels because of heavy rains or late spring runoff. In a fast-flowing river, six inches of water can sweep a person downstream and two feet can carry away most vehicles.

The Coroners Service also stresses that alcohol and water-based activities don't go together, any more than drinking and driving do. The review showed that fully 40 per cent of the victims were impaired by alcohol or drugs.

Further water safety tips are attached to this Information Bulletin.

Contact:
Barbara McLintock
Coroner, Strategic Programs
BC Coroners Service
250 356-9253

Water safety tips

- Always wear a properly fitting Personal Floatation Device (PFD) when engaged in boating or tubing activities. If you are suddenly thrown into cold and/or rough water, it may often be impossible to find a PFD and put it on, even if you had one in the boat with you. Children, non-swimmers and weak swimmers should also wear a PFD when wading or playing in the water at a river or lakeside.
- Be aware of the area where you are planning your activities. Check the weather forecast before heading out, and also do a visual inspection of the area. Do not head blindly down a river or stream without being aware of the water conditions further downstream.
- If you are hosting visitors from another province or country, ensure that they are informed about the conditions that prevail in the lake or river you are visiting. Warn them about steep drop-offs, rapids and any other hazards.
- Alcohol and water-related activities do not mix, any more than alcohol and driving do. Alcohol impairs your co-ordination and judgment, and this substantially adds to the risk inherent in swimming or boating.
- Always supervise children anywhere near water. Pre-school aged children can drown in only a few centimetres of water, and the drowning is often silent. Proper supervision for children of this age involves always having them within arm's length of a responsible adult.
- Never dive into unknown waters. Unexpectedly shallow water or hidden obstacles underwater can easily prove fatal.
- For further information about water safety tips, visit websites by such organizations as the Canadian Red Cross and the Lifesaving Society.