



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2024PSSG0058-000992
June 25, 2024

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Coroner, Lifesaving Society remind British Columbians to be water safe

Updated June 25, 2024

VICTORIA – The BC Coroners Service, together with the Lifesaving Society, are sharing a timely reminder of the risks associated with water activities.

Updated statistics from the BC Coroners Service report 101 people died by accidental drowning in British Columbia in 2023. Fatal drownings were most common during the summer months, notably in July, when 18 deaths were recorded.

“Our report looked at a 10-year period between 2013 and 2023, and we can see there is a higher percentage of drownings in the province during the months of May through August,” said John McNamee, acting chief coroner, BC Coroners Service. “Our report gives great clarity to the many dangers that water can hold. In 2023, just seven of those who died were not from B.C., so we hope both residents and visitors will take extra steps to enjoy water-based activities safely.”

The data revealed most deaths occurred in rivers, creeks, lakes and ponds. Nearly one in five deaths occurred while the person was boating. That same figure was reported for falls into water and while swimming.

“As we enter the summer, it is crucial to stay WaterSmart in, on and around the water,” said Lenea Grace, executive director, Lifesaving Society BC and Yukon. “Keep children within arm’s reach and never leave kids or non-swimmers unsupervised at the beach, by the lake or in the bathtub at home. We urge British Columbians to swim with a buddy in lifeguard-supervised areas, wear your life-jacket when boating and refrain from using alcohol and/or drugs while on the water. Don’t drink and drown!”

While alcohol- and drug-related data from 2023 is not yet available, between 2013 and 2022, alcohol and/or drugs were found to be a contributing factor in 39% of accidental drowning deaths.

Additional notable findings from the report, include:

- males accounted for four in five accidental drowning deaths;
- seven per cent of deaths were people under 19, while those aged 19 to 29 accounted for one in five;
- 51 deaths occurred in the Fraser River; and
- the lake or pond with the highest number of accidental drowning deaths was Okanagan Lake (29).

Learn More:

BC Coroners Service Accidental Drowning Deaths Report 2013-23:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/240619_accidental_drowning_web_report_2013-2023_for_posting.pdf

WaterSmart Education, Lifesaving Society, BC & Yukon Branch:

<https://www.lifesaving.bc.ca/watersmart>

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