
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Justice
BC Coroners Service

BC Coroners Service warns of high-water dangers

VICTORIA – On the eve of the Victoria Day long weekend, the BC Coroners Service is warning residents to take extreme care near streams and rivers which are currently running much faster and higher than normal.

People can significantly underestimate the force that can be unleashed by a fast-running river, said Chief Coroner Lisa Lapointe, and do not realize how different it is from the quiet stream where they regularly swim, raft or paddle.

Three such deaths already have occurred this spring: two young men swept away in Golden Ears Provincial Park, and a young woman who fell into Swift Current Creek near Valemount.

If a river is running quickly, about 15 ¼ centimetres (or six inches) of water can sweep a person downstream, and a little over six-tenths of a metre (or two feet) of water can carry away most vehicles.

Although the bank of a fast-running creek may look stable, such banks are often eroded by the water and can collapse with the added weight of persons standing on them. Moving water or standing pools of water also can contain dangerous debris, so no one should try to walk or drive through them.

The warning comes as the BC Coroners Service releases its newest report into Accidental Drowning Deaths, covering the five-year period from 2008 through 2012. The report looks at a total of 397 deaths over the five-year period. Of those, 58.7 per cent occurred in the summer months of May through August.

The statistics make clear the danger of mixing alcohol or drugs with water-related activities. Of all deaths recorded, impairment by alcohol or drugs was a factor in 40.2 per cent of the cases.

The full report can be found on the BC Coroners Service website at:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/accidental-drownings.pdf>

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