



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Summer water safety tips

VICTORIA – With summer officially here, and warm weather in the forecast for much of the province, the BC Coroners Service urges residents and visitors to take extra care when they are near rivers, lakes or the ocean.

Statistics collected by the BC Coroners Service consistently show a spike in drowning deaths each summer, with the numbers beginning to increase in May, and continuing to rise through August. While preliminary data from 2016 show a decline in the number of accidental drownings, the BC Coroners Service already is investigating four drowning incidents that occurred this month in British Columbia waterways. Data from 2016 show a total of 47 accidental drownings, the lowest number in the past decade, down from 80 in 2015. More than one-third of those deaths occurred in B.C.'s Southern Interior.

“All boaters and paddlers should wear a personal floatation device (PFD), not just have one in the boat with them,” said Lisa Lapointe, chief coroner. “Additionally, children, non-swimmers and weak swimmers should wear a PFD anytime they’re in or near the water. People don’t realize how quickly they can get into trouble, particularly when they’re in unfamiliar waters.”

The BC Coroners Service emphasizes the need for visitors from other countries, or even other regions, to understand the dangers that may lurk in or near B.C.'s lakes and rivers. These include sudden drop-offs into deep water, unexpectedly cold water temperatures, unexpected underwater obstacles, and unstable or slippery rock edges above cliffs and waterfalls. Waters in B.C. are frequently much colder than in other countries or provinces. If you are hosting someone from out of town, be sure to warn them of these potential hazards.

A further key point is to avoid mixing alcohol with swimming, boating or any water-based activity. Impairment greatly increases the chances of an accidental drowning.

“This is the time of year when we see too many carefree days on the water turn to tragedy due to alcohol, poor judgment or a momentary lapse in supervision of children,” said Dale Miller, executive director, Lifesaving Society – BC & Yukon Branch. “Although figures are improving, we are working toward a province that is free from drowning.”

Quick Facts:

- In any small craft, wear a properly fitted personal flotation device (PFD) at all times when on the water. Having one in the boat is not sufficient, as in as many as 70% of boating incidents, the person becomes separated from the boat.
- Children, non-swimmers and weak swimmers should also wear a PFD when wading or playing in the water at a river or lakeside.
- Do not mix alcohol with boating, swimming or other recreational water activities.

- A study published in the journal, Injury Prevention, suggests that someone with a blood-alcohol level of 0.10 has about 10 times the risk of drowning during boating as someone with none, and even a small amount of alcohol can increase the risk as a result of impaired co-ordination and judgment.
- Impairment is illegal for someone driving a boat, and is also a risk for passengers who are more likely to fall into the water.
- Impairment by alcohol or drugs is often a contributing factor in cases in which someone has accidentally fallen into water from shore.
- Be aware of the water conditions where you are planning your activities. Check the weather forecast before heading out and do a visual inspection of the area. Do not head down a river without being aware of the water conditions further downstream. If there are warning signs posted, obey them.
- 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, currents, cold water and any other hazards.
- Always supervise children anywhere near water. Pre-school-aged children can drown in only a few centimetres of water, and drowning is often silent. Young children should be within arm's reach of a responsible adult. Swim lessons do not replace the need to supervise children around water.
- Never dive into unknown waters. Unexpectedly shallow water or hidden obstacles underwater can easily prove fatal. Diving from cliffs or from other great heights is exceptionally risky.
- Never swim alone. Always have a buddy, and keep an eye out for each other.

Learn More:

The latest BC Coroners Report on accidental drownings can be found online:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/death-investigation/statistical-reports> (under Recreational Activities).

For further information about water safety tips, visit the following sites:

- Canadian Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/swimming-and-water-safety-tips-and-resources/swimming--boating-and-water-safety-tips>
- The Lifesaving Society: <http://www.lifesaving.bc.ca/boating-safety-tips-33-languages>

National Drowning Prevention Week (July 15-21, 2018):

<http://www.lifesaving.bc.ca/events/2012-07-21/national-drowning-prevention-week>

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