

## NSW DROWNINGS

Water Related Deaths and Death Rates 1995 - 2000/01

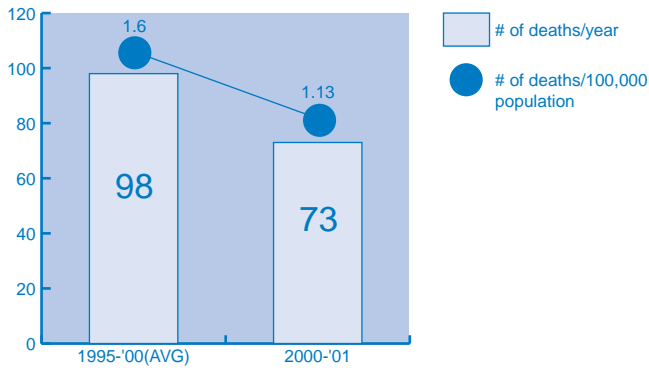


Chart 1

## LAKE, RIVER AND DAM DROWNINGS DECREASE BY 24%

2000-2001 revealed a significant decrease in lake, river and dam drownings. The flat, still appearance of lakes and rivers often give a false sense of security. These locations remain the most dangerous when it comes to drowning. 26 deaths were recorded at these locations during the period, a decrease of 8 on the figure of last year and a decrease of 24% on the 1995-2000 average. (See Chart #2)

The number of beach drownings is higher than the previous year's figure with 25 people drowning. This represents a decrease of 11% on the 5 year average.

Backyard private swimming pools claimed 7 lives and baths 4 which were both lower than the 5 year average. These two locations remain the biggest threat to children aged between 0-5 years. Parents are being urged to "KEEP WATCH".

# THE NSW DROWNING REPORT 2001

## 73 PEOPLE DROWNED IN NSW LAST YEAR! \*



## NSW DROWNINGS EDGE DOWNWARDS!

NSW trends indicate that 73 people drowned in preventable water related activities during the financial year 2000-2001. This figure is down by approximately 5% from the previous year and considerably lower than the previous five year average. Taking the NSW population growth into consideration, the preventable water related death rate is below the 1995 - 2000 average at 1.13 deaths per 100,00 population. (See Chart #1). Males contribute to over 85% of the total drowning figures.

With the approaching 2001-2002 summer, continued public awareness is essential to avoid the multiple drownings of previous summers. The message from The Royal Life Saving Society Australia NSW Branch is that when ever you are in, on or near an aquatic environment, "take care" and prevent further lives from being lost.

## NSW INLAND WATERWAYS DOMINATE DROWNINGS

Water Related Deaths by Location

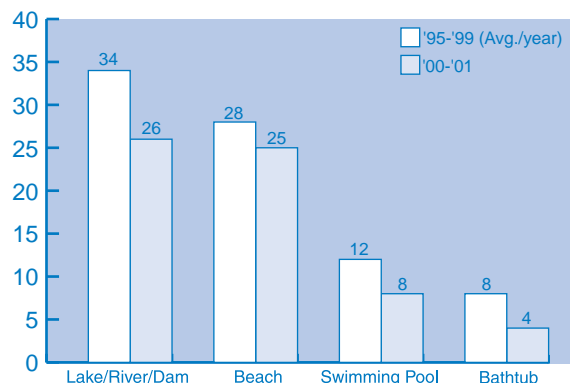


Chart 2

# PROMISING TREND IN 0-5 AGE GROUP!

Early indications for 2000-2001 suggest that 7 children under 5 years of age died as a result of drowning. (See Chart #3). This figure is one of the best in recent history but remains to be a national disgrace.

For every drowning death there was approximately three children admitted to hospital as a result of an immersion incident. In NSW this equates to about 21 "near-drowned"

## THE HOME CONTINUES TO CLAIM MOST TODDLERS

Backyard swimming pools and bathtubs continue to pose the greatest threat to young lives. Based on research patterns since 1994, swimming pools account for 48% of drowning in this age group. Research also indicates that the most likely method of entry is direct access due to the absence of any pool fencing.

## DANGERS ON RURAL PROPERTIES SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED

The 0-5 figures indicate that over 50% of drownings occurred in dams, lakes and rivers. The importance of supervision and the creation of child safe areas should not be underestimated. 75% of 0-5 drownings resulted from the child wandering off and falling into the water resulting in a submersion incident. This reinforces the message of "KEEP WATCH" whenever children are in, on or around water environments.



children. Every one of these incidents is a potential death. Studies have shown that between 5%- 20% of children who are admitted to hospital have suffered some form of brain damage, ranging from mild to severe.

**Drown** - to die from asphyxia due to submersion in a liquid medium.<sup>1</sup>

**Near Drowning** - survival following asphyxia due to submersion in a liquid medium.<sup>1</sup>

Despite wide spread public education programs throughout the media, child care centres and in hospitals, too many children are being lost in preventable water related accidents and a more targeted approach is needed.

## NSW TODDLER DROWNINGS

The Last 5 Years 1995-2000/01

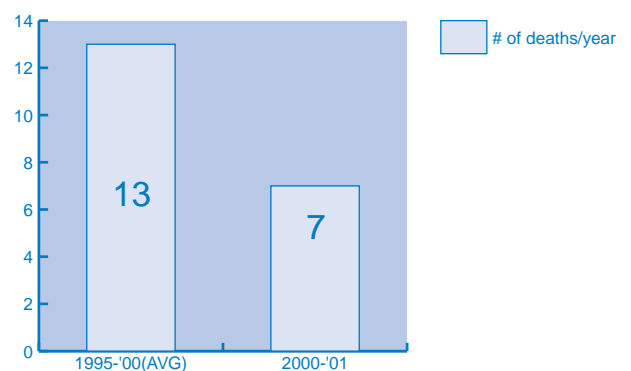


Chart 3

# THE STATE FORECAST

Despite increased education and public awareness campaigns, many NSW residents underestimate or remain unaware of the dangers associated with recreational water participation. Between 1992 and 1998 674 people have drowned in NSW.

While a large number of drownings occurred in the surf the majority of drowning occurred in swimming pools, dams, rivers and lakes.

With a growing, ageing population, and long term trends toward warmer weather, strong ongoing drowning prevention education is needed to significantly reduce the NSW toll.

## WHO DROWNS IN NSW?

(See Chart #4) The 2000-2001 figures suggest some positive trends in the early age groups and some continuing problems emerging in the middle and older age groups. All age groups have recorded a reduction against the NSW 5 year average.

Positive trends are emerging in the 0-5 and 6-14 year age groups, both achieving reductions against the five year average. Last year only 1 child drowned in the 6-14 age group. This can be attributed to increased levels of participation in swimming and water safety programs such as Swim and Survive.

Over 85% of all drownings identified are males. Young males in particular continue to participate in risk taking activities that have ended disastrously. 32 of the 36 drownings between the ages of 25 and 54 were males. 12 of these deaths were a result of rockfishing or boating activity. Drowning represents the fourth most common "accidental" cause of death in Australia following motor vehicle, accidental falls and poisoning.



The Royal Life Saving Society continues to educate NSW residents about how to modify their high risk behaviour and assume greater responsibility for themselves and others while in, on or around water.

It is tragic that 7 people drowned in backyard swimming pools, 2 of these under 5. Its alarming that older NSW residents are still none the wiser by either not wearing a life-jacket when aboard watercraft or by combining alcohol with aquatic participation. It is estimated that 30% of adult drowning can be attributed to alcohol consumption.

With the approaching summer The Royal Life Saving Society strongly encourages all residents of NSW to "KEEP WATCH" particularly during the holiday period. The majority of males who drowned between '92 and '98 died on a public holiday and females either on a school or public holiday.<sup>2</sup>

## WHO DROWNS IN NSW?

Preventable Water Related Deaths by Age Group 1995-2000/01

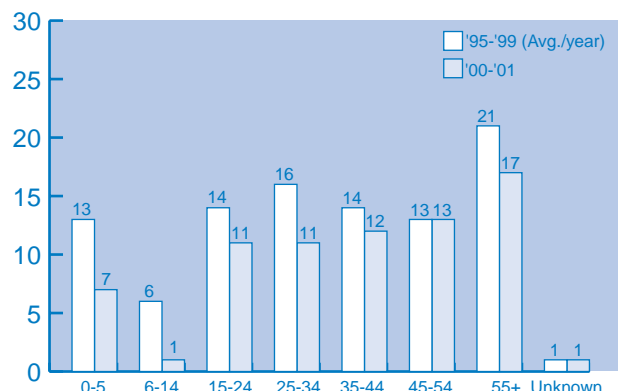


Chart 4

## DROWNING BY ACTIVITY

One great concern is the 18 deaths associated with "falling into water". These individuals had no intention of entering the water at the time of their death. (See Chart #5)

30 deaths resulted from swimming which is identical to last years figure and the 5 year average.

Watercraft related deaths were slightly below the average with 12 deaths. Recreational boaters need to ensure that their craft is seaworthy, that weather conditions are safe and that they have sufficient PFD's for all those on board.

Diving related drownings remain consistent with the five year average with 3 confirmed deaths over the selected period.

The Royal Life Saving Society is urging parents to take a greater role in the water safety education of their children. The following websites are very popular and useful sources of information for parents and teachers.

[www.wetnwise.com](http://www.wetnwise.com)

[www.swimandsurvive.com](http://www.swimandsurvive.com)

## NSW DROWNING BY ACTIVITY

Water Related Deaths by Activity 1995-2000/01

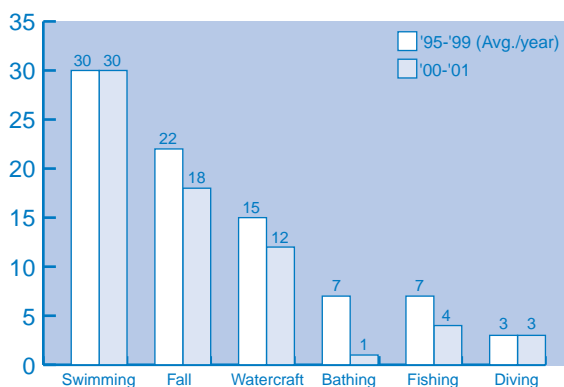


Chart 5

The RLSSNSW acknowledges the following organisations for their assistance:

IRMRC – Analysis of Drowning in Australia and Pilot Analysis of Near Drowning in NSW – Oct. 27, 2001

The RLSSA is in the business of lifesaving and is a national volunteer based organisation that continually strives to prevent aquatic related injury and death through its training programs, public education, research, consulting and international liaisons.

This report and the national report are available at [www.rlssa.org.au/nsw](http://www.rlssa.org.au/nsw).

**For more information contact: RLSSA NSW Branch on 02 9879 4699 or RLSSA Website: [www.rlssa.org.au](http://www.rlssa.org.au)**

\* This is an interim report based on police and coroner reports received by the 30th September 2001.

1. Australian Water Safety Council interim drowning and near drowning definition. (2001)

2. NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre UNSW – Analysis of Drowning in Australia and Pilot Analysis of Near Drowning in NSW October 27, 2000.

## TOURISTS – A CASE STUDY

Between 1992 and 1998, there were 30 tourists deaths due to drowning. This represents over 25% of the national tourist drowning figures. Most of these occurred in open water environments. 8 tourists (interstate and international) drowned over the recorded period 2000-2001.



## KEEP WATCH

In children under 5 years of age, drowning is the number one cause of preventable death. The "KEEP WATCH" program has already reduced the number of infant and toddler drownings by 25%. Our mission with your help is to continue with this positive trend and wipe out 0-5 drownings altogether. Keep watch and keep them alive.

KEEP WATCH – Phone the RLSSA NSW Branch on 9879 4699 for further information.



# Royal Life Saving

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