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Media Release

For immediate release



2004 Drownings Continue Low Trend

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) today released the provisional drowning figure for 2004, stating that 110 people drowned in New Zealand, the lowest toll (provisionally) since records began in 1980.

WSNZ Executive Director, Alan Muir said that the continuing reduction in drownings was most pleasing. “The continuing reduction in drownings can in part be attributed to the public’s acceptance of a need for greater risk assessment to be made before being involved in aquatic activities and also their uptake to the various water safety messages and education programmes now available to them”.

The overall reductions since the 1980’s illustrates the progress being made to reduce the annual drowning toll.

1980’s	Average	181
1990’s	“	143
2000’s	“	123

Traditionally drownings occur in two major categories recreational and non-recreational (when the victim had no intent on being in the water for recreational purposes).

Key points from the recreational category include:

- No drownings in the under 4m powered crafts, the first time this has occurred in what has been historically the most at risk boating activity.
- The increase in kayaking incidents leading to six drownings.
- The significant drowning reduction in the underwater activities of scuba diving and snorkelling.

Significant points from the non-recreational category are:

- Lowest toll from immersion accidents. Total of 18 compared to the previous low of 24 in 1995.
- The overall reduction in this category being maintained. Until 2003 non-recreational was always higher than the drownings in recreational activities.

- The reduction in the under five age group drowning from an average of 12 over the past 10 years to four in 2004.

From a site specific point of view, our inland waterways (rivers, creeks and streams) are most dangerous, accounting for 40 drownings, of which 14 were due to road vehicle accidents. A further six drowned in lakes. Typically, approximately one third of all drownings occur in rivers.

While pleased that the drowning toll is continuing to reduce Mr Muir said “much more can be achieved in the area of water based recreation, in particular, land based fishing, non powered boats and swimming activities at all sites such as the beach, rivers, lakes or in pools. While we continue to target these areas to hopefully drive the drowning toll downwards further we must also continue to ensure the gains made are maintain, not always an easy task”.

Muir continues, “while the weather this summer has not been conducive to water based activities, January is traditionally the month when most drownings occur. Sooner or later it can be expected that the weather will improve and this will attract people to get out and enjoy the aquatic environment. It is therefore important that while people wish to enjoy what is left of the summer that they do so through matching their skills, knowledge and behaviour to the environment they wish to enjoy”.

...Ends...

For more information or interview contact

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2004 Drowning Fact Sheet



Provisional drowning statistics from DrownBase™, the official database of Water Safety New Zealand as at 7 January 2005.

A total of 110 people drowned in New Zealand in the year 2004

- 86 (78%) of all drowning victims were male
- Alcohol was known to have been involved in 18 (16%) of the cases

Non-recreational breakdown

- The 58 non-recreational drownings represents 53% of the total drownings
- Immersion accidents accounted for 18 (16%) drownings
- 17 (15%) drownings were as a result of road vehicle accidents

Recreational breakdown

- Recreational drownings totalled 52, (47%)
- Boating accounted for 16 (15%) drownings. Power boating 7 (6%), non-powered 8 (7%) and sailing 1. 11 (10%) of those boating were in the 40+ age bracket and all 16 boaties except one were male
- 13 (12%) people drowned while angling, net or shell fishing
- 13 (12%) people drowned while swimming
- Three drownings occurred while participating in underwater activities of scuba diving and snorkelling
- Seven drowned while participating in water sport/recreation activities (board riding, boogie boarding, diving, tubing and jumping)

Site breakdown

- 40 (36%) people drowned in inland waterways including rivers, creeks and streams
- Six (5%) people drowned in lakes and quarries
- A total of 24 (22%) people drowned at beaches (10 at surf beaches, eight at the rocky foreshore and six at calm water beaches)
- 19 (17%) people drowned in the open sea
- 14 (13%) people drowned in the harbour, estuary or the river/harbour bar
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Ethnicity breakdown

- Caucasians = 57 (52%)
- Maori = 24 (22%)
- Asians = 13 (12%)
- Pacific Islanders = 9 (8%)
- Other = 4 (4%) (Including an Afghan, an Indian and two Czech)
- Unknown = 3 (3%)

Age breakdown

- The most at risk age group in 2004 was the 20-24 year old age group with 16 (15%) drownings
- The next at risk groups were 25-29 year olds and 40-44 year olds with 11 (10%) drownings apiece
- The 30-34 years age group had 10 (9%) drownings.
- In the under five year old age group there were four (4%) drownings

Water Safety New Zealand Annual Drowning Statistics by Activity to 2004



Provisional Statistics

Activity	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Totals
Recreational																					
Land Based Fishing																					
Angling	7	2	3	4	10	5	10	5	4	9	4		7	3	4	5	5	8	1	5	101
Net Fishing	4	1	3	3				2	8	1			2	1	5		2	2	5	5	44
Shellfishing	2		1			2	1	1		1	4	1	4	1	1		3	4	2	3	31
Non Powered Boat																					
Canoeing	1	1	2	1			1	2	4		3		1	1			4	4			25
Kayaking	2	3	3		2	1	2		3	1	1		1	1		6	1	2	3	6	38
Rafting	9	3		5	2	3		4		4	2				2		2		1		37
Rowing Craft / Dinghy	5	8	3	3	6	6		6	5		5	4	6		1	2	6	5	3	2	76
Powered Boat																					
Jet Boat	2		1	1	2	3	1				2	2							1		15
Jet Skis			1	1					1					1							4
Over 4m	3	8	7	2	11	8	4	3	6	4	3	7	3	2	5	6	1	5	8	7	103
Under 4m	5	7	10	7	6	11	5	6	15	8	3	7	2	10	5	8	9	8	2		134
Sailing																					
Fixed Keel Boat		1	1	1	2	2	2	1		1	3	2	3		2	2		1	1		25
Offshore Sailing	6				5			3			3			2			1	1		1	22
Sailing Dinghy					2				1												3
Trailer Sailer	5	1		2	1		1					1	1								12
Underwater																					
Free Diving							1			1	1								2	1	6
Scuba Diving	12	2	6	7	3	7	6	3	6	6	6	6	7	5	3	7	1	4	8	1	106
Snorkelling	4	4	5	1	2	2	2	4	1	4	5	1	3	3	1	3	3	2	1	2	53
Water Sport / Recreation																					
Board Riding					1				1	1				1	2	1			2	2	11
Boogie Boarding							1				1			3	1		2	1	1	3	13
Diving	1		2	1	2	1			1	3	1	1	5	3	2	1	1	1	1		27
Jumping																				1	2
Swimming	31	25	13	15	11	26	18	7	12	17	22	19	18	26	19	10	9	13	18	13	342
Tubing		1	1	1		1	1			1		1								1	9
Water Skiing																1	1				2
Windsurfing						1										2	1				4
Total Recreational	99	67	62	55	68	79	55	48	68	62	69	52	63	63	53	54	53	63	60	52	1245
Non-Recreational																					
Miscellaneous																					
Flood/Civil Emergen	4			4												1		1		1	11
Homicide					1		2	1					5	1		3	2				15
Immersion Accident	36	39	29	43	40	41	30	30	25	32	24	35	33	39	33	33	32	40	26	18	658
Non-Water Related	4	2	7	8	5	4	3	5	4	6	11	5	1	1	2	3		1	3		75
Rescuing Others	4	2	1	2	3	4	4	5	2		1	1	2	3	2	4	2	5	1	3	51
Suicide	19	32	25	14	18	14	22	19	24	13	20	13	20	14	18	16	14	15	11	14	355
Occupational Related																					
Commercial Fishing	16	7	9	15	4	4	6	7	10	1	4	18		9	4	4	3	1	1	4	127
Other Commercial	3	7		2			2		2		5	1	2	2	1	4					31
Transportation																					
Aircraft			3		3	1	1		1	2				4	2					1	18
Passenger Ship	4	1		2																	7
Road Vehicle	25	21	27	22	22	9	22	15	18	16	25	15	12	12	12	10	15	12	16	17	343
Total Non-Recreational	115	111	101	112	96	77	92	82	86	70	90	88	75	85	74	78	68	75	58	58	1691
Total Drownings	214	178	163	167	164	156	147	130	154	132	159	140	138	148	127	132	121	138	118	110	2936

