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National Summer Safety Week is a time to beware of how to avoid drowning

Almost nine per cent of Canada is covered by freshwater.

According to Environment Canada, this accounts for more than 890,000 square kilometers. Such a significant water presence in the country makes it absolutely critical that Canadians everywhere take measures to prevent drowning and avoid putting themselves and others in danger.

National Summer Safety Week is running from May 1 to 7, and the Canada Safety Council would like to remind Canadians about the inherent risk of being around water, the steps that can be taken to mitigate disaster before it occurs and the importance of taking swimming lessons.

In 2013, the last year in which full data is available from the Chief Coroner's and Medical Examiner's offices, there were 456 unintentional water fatalities in Canada. This represents a decline from 2012, and the second-lowest number of fatalities since 2004. Over the five-year timespan from 2009 to 2013, unintentional water fatalities account for a yearly average of 1.4 per 100,000 Canadians.

According to the Lifesaving Society, the underlying demographic information continues to stay static, with the most represented groups in these statistics remaining people between the ages of 20 and 24 (accounting for 9.6 per cent of the total in 2013,) people over the age of 65 (19.3 per cent) and men (81.4 per cent average over the last five years.)

A disproportionate amount of these fatalities occur as a result of recreational activities, including more than a quarter of all fatalities occurring while boating. Many of these fatalities involved alcohol consumption, which can impair judgment, reaction time and sense of balance. Not only is drinking and boating illegal, but it's also not smart. Don't do it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 82 per cent of those involved in boating-related fatalities were not wearing personal flotation devices. Lifejackets save lives. Having one present in the boat but not accessible in emergency situations isn't effective or useful. If you're planning on being near water, wear your lifejacket. You never know when something unexpected might happen and you're thrown in the water involuntarily.

To that point, only 25 per cent of unintentional fatalities were the result of aquatic activities where the victim intended on being in the water. This highlights quite clearly the importance of knowing how to swim. In an emergency, it's critical that you know how to get your head above the surface of the water and to keep it there. If you're anything less than 100 per cent confident in your swimming abilities, take swimming lessons. It's never too late, and it's a lifelong skill that may very well end up being the difference for you some day.

Drowning deaths are tragic and entirely avoidable, whether it's in relation to an unsupervised two-year-old child in a private pool, a 23-year old man on a boat or a 72-year old woman drowning in a bathtub. Do your part to keep yourself and those around you as protected as possible. A person can drown in just a few short seconds and very quietly. Be on hand to help in an emergency, and ensure that someone else is around for you. Together, we can make a difference.