

Stay safe on the water during the summer

When the average person thinks of drowning-related deaths, their minds may immediately wander to islands or densely-populated land-masses surrounded by water on all sides.

But drowning is a real problem in Canada, too. In 2014, there were at least 308 preventable water-related deaths in Canada, according to the Lifesaving Society of Canada.

The Canada Safety Council is reminding Canadians from coast-to-coast to take special care around water, whether they are accomplished swimmers, frequent water users or parents to a young child who is getting familiar with their surroundings.

Water-related fatalities are especially tragic because they are entirely preventable. The vast majority of these deaths occur during recreational activities, including swimming, powerboating, fishing from a boat and walking near water or thin ice.

In fact, many Canadians who drowned never had any intention of being in the water in the first place. If there's a pool, lake or other body of water nearby, consider putting up fencing around the hazard to limit the danger.

The most important preventive measure people can take to keep themselves safe is to wear a personal floatation device. Canadian law requires that there be at least one PFD on a boat for every boater, which is a great start. However, it's not realistic to expect that one will be able to locate and put on your PFD if adverse or unexpected conditions arise.

Get in the habit of wearing a PFD at all times while on a boat. It can quite literally make the difference between life and death.

According to the Canada Drowning Report 2015, based on incidents where PFD information was available, four out of five water-related fatalities due to boating could have been mitigated if the victim was wearing a lifejacket.

Swim with a buddy. It's always a good idea to ensure that swimmers are within earshot and sightline if they get caught under a strong current, lose their bearings or get trapped under something.

Crucial as well in water safety is supervision, especially among young children. They are especially susceptible to drowning. A child can drown in just a few centimeters of water, meaning that everything from bathtubs to buckets can be potentially dangerous. Stay within arm's length from a child at all times when they are in or near water.

Additionally, drowning can happen in seconds and very quietly, so even something as simple as answering the door or taking a phone call can be a difference-maker. Parents should take their child with them if they have to be away from the water.

There is also a lot of value in enrolling children for swimming lessons. Being a good swimmer isn't enough in and of itself to keep an individual safe 100 per cent of the time, but being a weak swimmer or, worse, a non-swimmer, can be a severe detriment in getting to safety.

Canada, as a whole, has been getting better in addressing drowning prevention. Long-term statistics dictate a general downward trend in water-related fatalities, but there is still much work to be done. Be mindful of water safety and do your part to keep lakes, oceans, pools, bathtubs and any other body of water safe for yourself and for others.