

326 PEOPLE DROWNED THIS YEAR !

AUSTRALIAN DROWNINGS EDGE DOWNWARDS - AFTER A TRAGIC SUMMER

National trends for the financial year '97 - '98 suggest that 326 people drowned in preventable water related activities. This figure is down by approximately 5 % from the previous year and almost identical to the average of the previous five years. Taking the Australian population growth into consideration, the preventable water-related death rate was down slightly in '97 - '98, to 1.8 deaths per 100,000 population. (See Chart # 1).

After a horrific summer period where an extraordinary numbers of deaths by drowning were recorded, (over 30 at surf beaches alone during January and February.) There was a steadying of figures due to increased community awareness of aquatic recreational dangers, thus providing a 5% reduction for the 12 month period.

With the approaching summer, continued public awareness is essential to avoid the catastrophes of last summer.

LAKES, RIVERS & DAMS TAKE MOST LIVES - OVERVIEW

1997 - 1998 revealed an upward trend in lake, river, dam and beach drownings. The flat, still appearance of lakes and rivers often gives a false impression. These locations remain as the most dangerous when it comes to drowning. 101 deaths were recorded at these locations during the recorded period. (See Chart # 2).

The number of beach drownings can only be described as the worst in recent history with a total of 61 deaths. This figure represents a doubling of the '92 - '96 average.

Backyard private swimming pools and bathtubs also showed high proportions of drownings with 39 and 18 recorded respectively. Since 1992 over 300 lives have been lost in pools and 120 in bathtubs.

The trend of 0-5 year olds drowning, particularly in these two locations remains a national disgrace.

AUSTRALIAN DROWNINGS SLIGHTLY DOWN IN 97 - 98

Chart # 1: Preventable Water-Related Deaths and Death Rates 1992 - 1997/98
All Ages

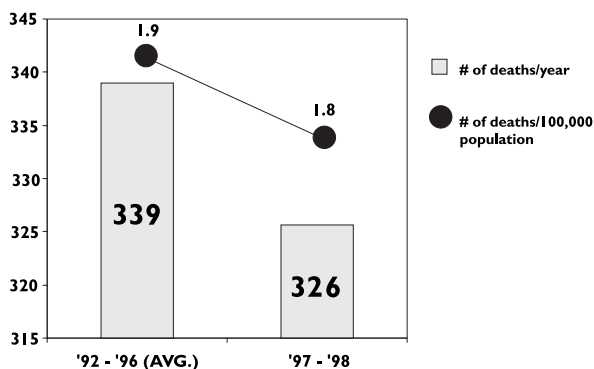


Chart # 1

LAKES, DAMS & RIVERS REMAIN AS NATION'S DROWNING BLACKSPOTS

Chart # 2: Water Related Deaths by Location
All Ages

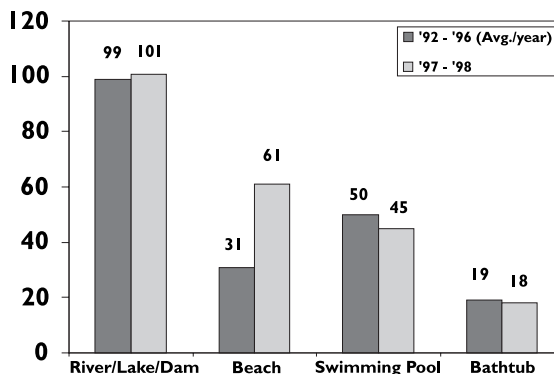


Chart # 2

0 - 5 OUR NATIONAL DISGRACE

OUR BABIES CONTINUE TO DROWN

Early indications for '97 - '98 suggest that 52 Australian children under 5 years of age died as a result of drowning. (See Chart # 3). For every drowning death it is estimated that approximately six children were admitted to hospital as a result of immersion incidents.

In Australia this therefore equates to about 312 "near-drowned" children. Every one of these immersion incidents is a potential death. Studies have shown that between 5 % and 20 % of children who are admitted to hospital have suffered some form of brain damage, ranging from mild to severe.

This leaves Australia each year with between 20 and 90 children with brain damage. At a cost of around \$20 million each for educational and rehabilitation programs and on-going treatment for the rest of their lives, this places a significant social and economic cost to the families involved and society as a whole.

SWIMMING POOLS CLAIM MOST TODDLERS

182 children under 5 years of age have drowned in backyard swimming pools and spas since 1992. Based on research patterns the most likely method of entry is by direct access due to the absence of a pool fence. (See Table # 1).

The 0 - 5 figures have long been described as a national disgrace, and have not shown any significant decrease over the past five years. Downward trends were evident in '93 - '94, but following year's figures were again higher. 75% of 0 - 5 drownings result from a child falling into or wandering off which then results in a submersion incident. This reinforces the message of "KEEP WATCH" when ever children are in, on or around water. Over the recorded period, the 0 - 5 figures make up over 20% of the total drowning figure. Lakes and rivers, as well as bathtubs make up over 40% of the 0 - 5 age group figure. (See Chart # 4).



**Children don't just drown in pools.
Your child needs supervision.**

BACKYARD POOLS CLAIM MOST 0 - 5'S
Table # 1 - Most Likely Cause of Entry

176 - 0 - 5 year old Backyard Swimming Pool Deaths (1992 - '97 - '98)

No attempt to provide a pool fence	53	30.1%
Direct house access to pool area	43	24.4%
Gate propped open	33	18.8%
Defective pool gate	27	15.3%
Defective pool fence	10	5.7%
Climbed side of above ground pool	10	5.7%

Table # 1

WHERE THERE IS WATER KIDS DROWN

Chart # 3: Water Related Deaths - 0 - 5 Age Group

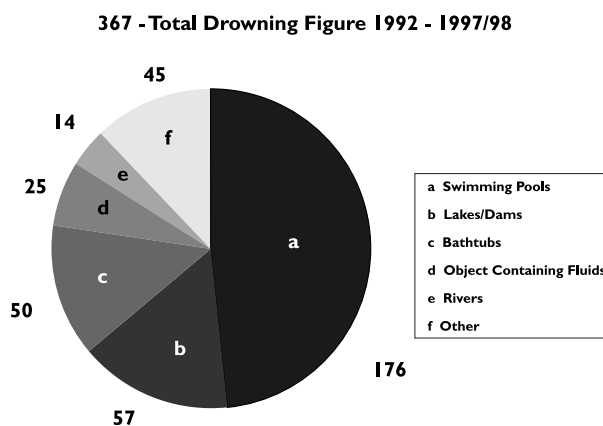


Chart # 3

TODDLER DROWNINGS A NATIONAL DISGRACE

Chart # 4: 0 - 5 Year Age Group Water Related Deaths: 1992 - 1997/98

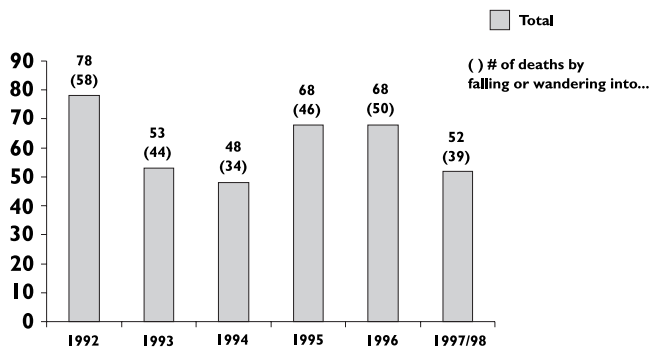


Chart # 4

THE NATIONAL FORECAST

Chart # 5: National Figures with State Breakdown

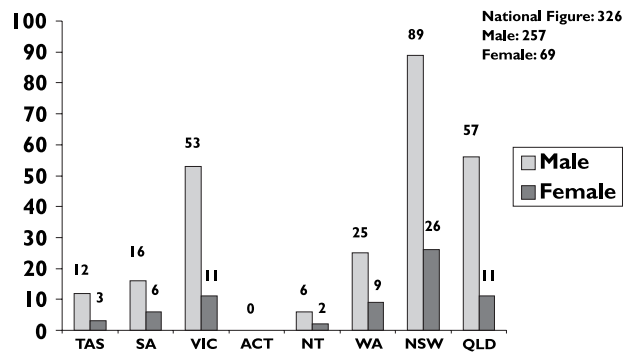


Chart # 5

THE NATIONAL FORECAST

This is the fourth annual National Drowning Report produced by The Royal Life Saving Society Australia, and despite increased education and public awareness campaigns, many Australians underestimate or remain unaware of the dangers associated with recreational water participation. The national trends remain disturbingly high.

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

This is the goal of The Royal Life Saving Society Australia which continues to educate Australians about how to modify their high risk behaviour and assume greater responsibility for themselves and others while in or around water. It is tragic, for example, that so many Australian children drown each year in backyard swimming pools and baths, and that older Australians are still none the wiser about either the importance of wearing a life-jacket when on watercraft or about the effect of combining alcohol with aquatic participation. It is estimated that 50 % of adult drownings can be attributed to alcohol consumption.

WHO DROWNS IN AUSTRALIA

(See Chart # 5). The '97 - '98 figures suggest some positive trends in the lower age groups and some problems emerging in the older age brackets.

The 6 - 9 age group has returned a positive result in that only 6 children drowned which is significantly less than the five year average of 14.

The 0 - 5 figures have reduced slightly, but remain unacceptable. The figures identified indicate that 1 child between the ages of 0 - 5 drowns every week in this country.

Poor results have been recorded for the age groups 30 - 39, 40 - 49, 50 - 59 and 60 - 69. The figures for '97 - '98 are higher than the five year average.

Almost 80% of the figures identified are males. Young males in particular continue to participate in risk taking activities which can often end disastrously. Drowning represents the third most common "accidental cause" of death in Australia behind motor vehicle / traffic, accidents and accidental falls.

WHO DROWNS IN AUSTRALIA PREVENTABLE WATER-RELATED DEATHS BY AGE GROUP

Chart # 6: Water Related Deaths by Age Group - 1992 - 1997/98

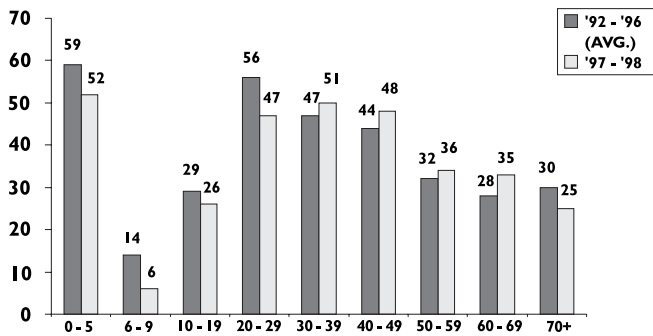


Chart # 6

ACTIVITY

(See Chart # 7). During the 1997-98 summer period, particularly January and February, the "swimming" related drownings were significantly up on the five year average. The formulation of the National Water Safety Plan by the Australian Water Safety Council has addressed numerous issues to ensure that identified problems are solved so that a repeat of the summer past does not become a continuing trend.

Drownings by "falls" had a marked reduction of approximately 23% for '97 - '98 which is a significant result. Falls are usually associated with children falling into

DROWNING BY ACTIVITY

Chart # 7: Water-Related Deaths by Activity 1992 - 1997/98

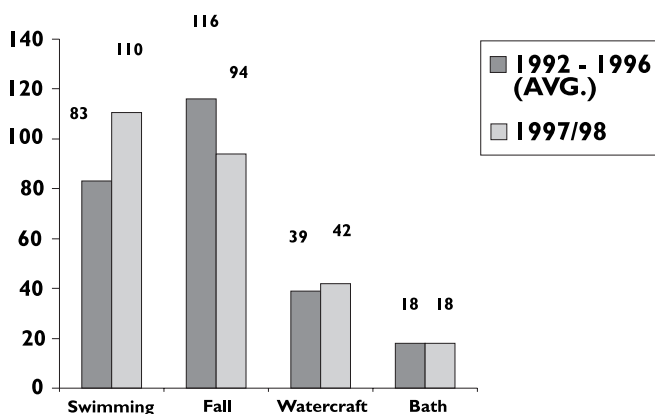


Chart # 7

swimming pools, rock fisherman being swept off rocks and individuals falling off boats etc.

Watercraft and bathing deaths by drowning have remained in-line with the five year average. Bathtub drownings are one category which is usually dominated by females. 60% of bathtub drownings are female. (See Chart # 8)

BATHTUBS - A CASE STUDY

The following two graphs provide an insight into the ages of those who drown in bathtubs as well as gender type. This is the one location where females have a higher drowning percentage than men.

DROWNINGS IN AUSTRALIA

1992 - 97/98
BATHTUBS-ALL AGES

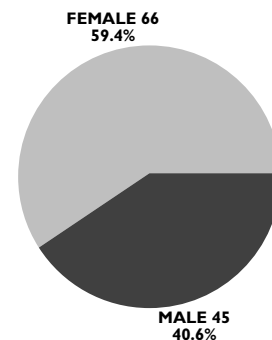


Chart # 8

BATHTUB DROWNINGS
1992 - 97/98
AGE GROUPS

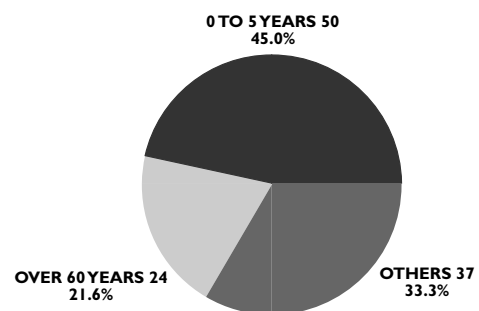


Chart # 9



ACT 02 6260 5800
TAS 03 6234 1214

NSW 02 9879 4699
WA 089383 9988

SA 08 8234 9244
VIC 03 9568 5822

NT 08 8981 5036
QLD 07 3823 2823

The Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) acknowledges the following organisations for their assistance:
The Australian Bureau of Statistics, National and State Injury Surveillance Units, Coronal Information and other sources.

The RLSSA is in the business of lifesaving and is a National volunteer-based organisation which works to prevent aquatic related injury and death through its training programs, public education, research, consulting and international liaisons

For more information contact: RLSSA National Branch on: 02 9181 5444 or RLSSA Website: www.rlssa.org.au

