

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 2002, 674 people have drowned in NSW.

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

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

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

It is tragic that 7 people drowned in backyard swimming pools, 3 of these under 5. In adults, it is a tragedy that people are still drowning because of simple safety oversights such as not wearing a life-jacket when aboard watercraft or by combining alcohol with aquatic participation. It is estimated that 30% of adult drownings can be attributed to alcohol consumption.

Who Drowns in NSW (2001/02) "Males Continue to Dominate Statistics" (See Chart 4)

The 2001-2002 figures suggest poor re-emerging trends in the early age groups and some continuing problems in the middle and older age groups. All age groups have recorded figures closely aligned to the NSW 5 year average.

Poor trends are emerging in the 0-5 and 6-14 year age groups, both achieving increases against last year's figures although the 0-5 year olds matched the five year average.

Over 82% of all drownings identified are males. Young males in particular continue to participate in risk taking activities that have ended disastrously. 43 of the 46 drownings in the 25-54 age group were males. 11 of these deaths were a result of rock fishing and 5 from boating activity. Drowning represents the fourth most common "accidental" cause of death in Australia following motor vehicle, accidental falls and poisoning.

Drowning By Activity (2001/02) (See Chart 5)

Of great concern is the 24 deaths associated with "falling into water". These individuals had no intention of entering the water at the time of their death. (See Chart 5.)

35 deaths resulted from swimming which is higher than last year's figure of 30 and the 5 year average of 31.

Watercraft related deaths were slightly below the average with 11 deaths. Recreational boaters need to ensure that their craft is seaworthy, that weather conditions are safe and that they have sufficient PFDs for all those on board.

Diving related drownings remain consistent with the five year average with 4 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
www.swimandsurvive.com
www.safetwaters.nsw.gov.au
www.rlssa.org.au

This report and the national report are available at www.rlssa.org.au/nsw

For more information contact: RLSSA NSW Branch on

1300 7 3 7 7 6 3
 1300 RESQME

or RLSSA Website: www.rlssa.org.au

Chart 4 – Who Drowns in New South Wales? Preventable Water Related Deaths by Age Group 1995 – 2001/02

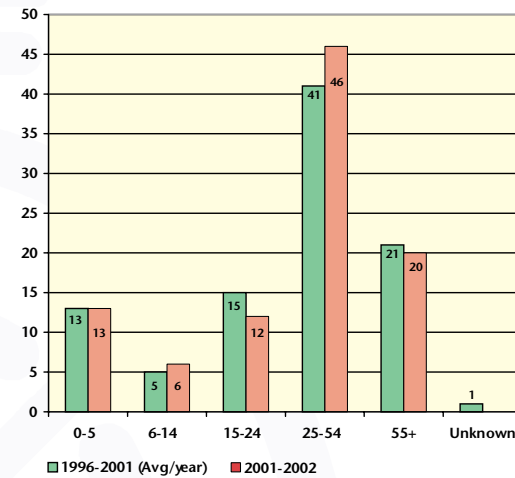
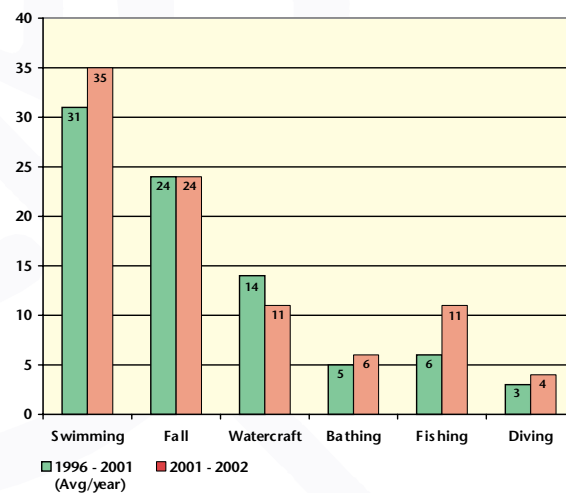


Chart 5 – Drowning By Activity Water Related Deaths by Activity 1995 – 2001/02

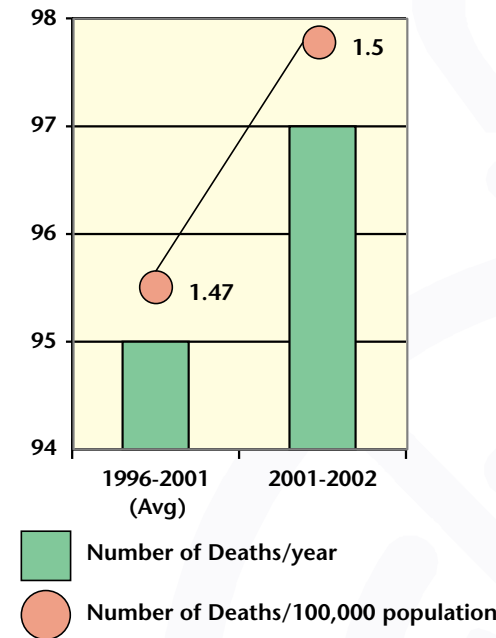


THE NSW DROWNING REPORT 2002

97 People Drowned in NSW last Year!*

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

Chart 1 – NSW Drownings – Water Related Deaths and Death Rates 1996 – 2001/02



NSW Drownings Edge Upwards

NSW trends suggest that 97 people drowned in preventable water related activities during the financial year 2001-2002. This figure is up by approximately 33% from the previous year although in line with the previous five year average of 95. Taking the NSW population growth into consideration, the preventable water related death rate is slightly above the 1996-2001 average at 1.5 deaths per 100,000 population (see Chart 1). Males contribute to over 82% of the total drowning figures.

With the approaching 2002-2003 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 whenever you are in, on or near an aquatic environment, "Keep Watch" particularly of young children and prevent further lives from being lost.

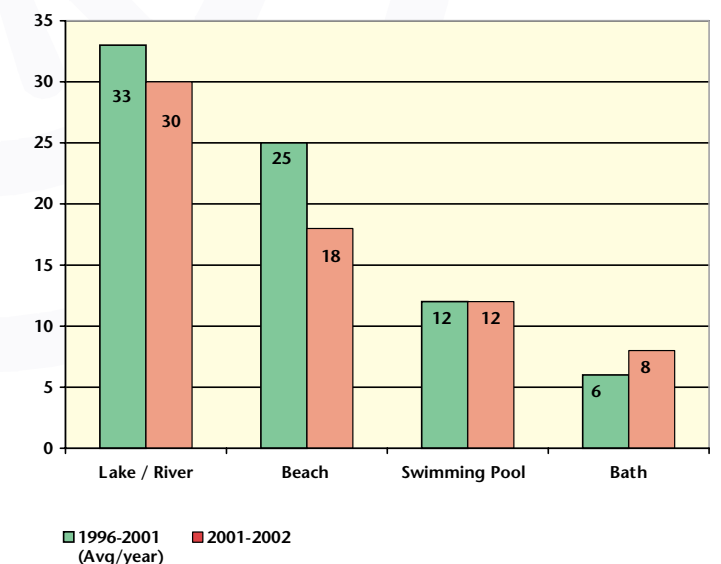
Lake, River And Dam Account for 30 Drownings in 2001-2002

2001-2002 continues to reveal a significant loss of life in lake, river and dam drownings. The flat, still appearance of lakes and rivers often give a false impression. These locations remain the most dangerous when it comes to drowning. 30 deaths were recorded at these locations during the period, an increase of 6 on the figure of last year and slightly below the 1996-2001 average of 33 (see Chart 2).

The number of beach drownings is lower than the previous year's figure with 18 people drowning (down from 25) and this represents a decrease of 27% on the 5 year average.

Backyard private swimming pools claimed 7 lives of which 3 of these were aged under 5. Drowning in the bath accounted for 8 deaths up from the previous year's figure of 4 and up against the 5 year average of 6. These two locations remain the biggest threat to children aged between 0-5 years. Parents are being asked to be vigilant and "Keep Watch" whenever children are around the backyard pool or in the bath.

Chart 2 – Inland Waterways Dominate Drownings Water Related Deaths by Location 1996 – 2001/02



Supported by:

A NSW GOVERNMENT WATER SAFETY INITIATIVE

0-5's – A Case Study “Analysis of Drownings involving Children aged 0-5 in NSW” (1995–April 2001)

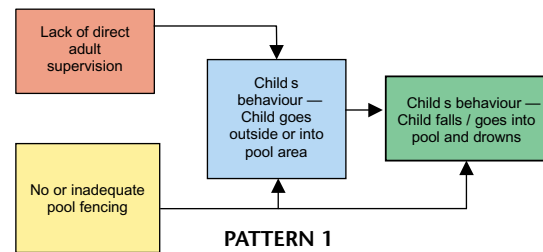
- FACT – Drownings occur all year round, not seasonally as in adults.
- FACT – A total of 82 children 0-5 died as a result of accidental drowning over the research period.
- FACT – Around 60% of drownings occurred within the child’s own home, and over two-thirds occurred in suburban or metropolitan areas.
- FACT – Drownings in metropolitan/suburban areas occurred most commonly in pools and baths, drowning in rural areas occurred most commonly in other bodies of water, in particular, dams.
- FACT – Of the 82 deaths 34% drowned in pools, 16% in bath tubs, 13 in dams and 12 in lakes and rivers.

Characteristics of Swimming Pool Drownings

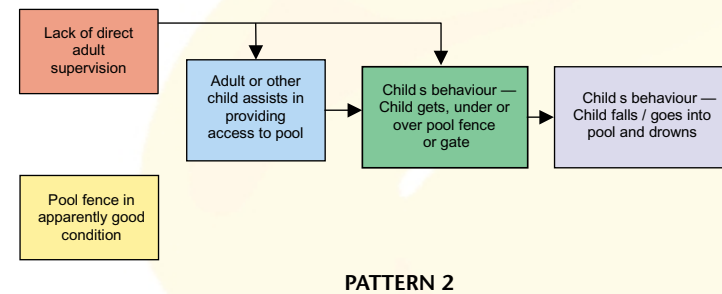
The most common factors contributing to swimming pool drowning were a lack of direct adult supervision, combined with faulty safety equipment, such as pool fences and gates. Whilst in some cases the contributing role of fencing related to the equipment itself, such as not being present or being in a state of disrepair, in other cases it was the way in which equipment was handled by adults and other children (i.e. leaving the pool gate open, or leaving objects against barriers allowing footholds etc). Clearly the maintenance and appropriate usage of swimming pool fences and gates are problems which need addressing. The behaviour of adults in not providing adequate supervision was the main contributing factor to all of the deaths.

Analysis of the 34 Pool Related Drownings for 0-5 Year Olds

There are four distinct patterns that emerged from the research conducted. The primary pattern to emerge, seen in 13 cases (38.2%), was characterised primarily by the combination of the inadequacy of swimming pool fencing, a lack of direct adult supervision and the behaviour of children themselves. In 5 cases the pool was not fenced, in 5 cases the pool fences/gates were in a state of disrepair and in 3 cases there was a fault with the design of the pool fence/gate.



Pattern 2 accounted for 9 cases (26.5%), and was characterised primarily by the existence of a pool fence in apparently good condition, but the drowning occurred due to lack of direct adult supervision in combination with access being provided to the pool by another child or an adult.



0-5 Year Olds – A Continuing Dilemma

On average every 4 weeks a child under the age of 5 drowns somewhere in NSW!

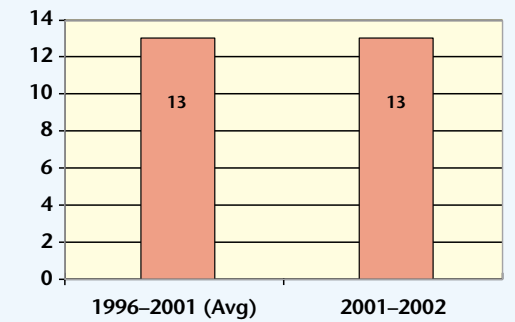
Drowning Figures Double in 2001/02

Indications for 2001-2002 suggest that 13 children under 5 years of age died as a result of drowning (see Chart 3). This figure is identical to the previous 5 year average and therefore remains a significant problem. Of the 13 child deaths aged 0-5, 4 drowned in lakes (all regional), 1 in a river, 2 in the bath, 5 in pools (both private and public) and 1 at the beach.

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 39 “near-drowned” 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.

Near Drowning – Survival following asphyxia due to immersion in a liquid medium. Near drownings resulted in the hospitalisation of more than 1,637 residents between 1992 and 1998.

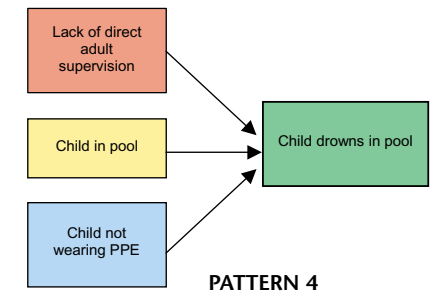
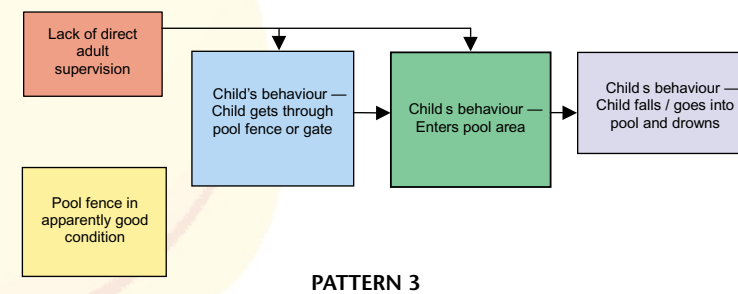
Chart 3 – 0-5 Age Group Drownings The Last 5 Years 1996–2001/02



- SUPERVISE YOUR CHILD
- FAMILIARISE YOUR CHILD WITH WATER
- LEARN RESUSCITATION
- FENCE YOUR POOL

Pattern 4 seen in 3 cases, consisted of children being in the water, without direct adult supervision.

Pattern 3 accounted for 8 cases, again involving apparently intact pool fences. The primary circumstances of this pattern involved an unsupervised child gaining access to the pool by breaching the pool fence either through the fence itself or through the gate.



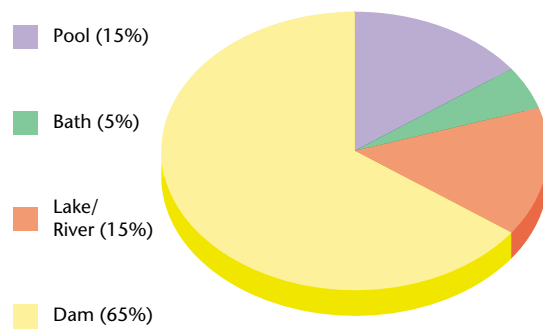
It is evident by the casual patterns that there are some consistent issues i.e. lack of direct adult supervision, that have emerged. It is therefore vital that all the “Keep Watch” messages are implemented and/or observed.

The four key messages include: • SUPERVISE YOUR CHILD • FAMILIARISE YOUR CHILD WITH WATER • LEARN RESUSCITATION • FENCE YOUR POOL

Analysis of Drownings Involving Children Aged Five Years and Under in New South Wales (1995-April 2001) Ann Williamson, Penelope Irvine and Samantha Sadural, NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre Report for the NSW Water Safety Taskforce September, 2002

Characteristics of Bathtub Drowning

Bathtub drowning was most common in the one year old group, followed by babies less than 12 months of age. The single biggest contributing factor to bathtub drowning was a lack of direct adult supervision, with children being left alone, or with another child, in the bath. Sometimes this may have been for a few moments, although in some cases it appeared to be for longer periods, with children being left in the bath whilst a parent/carer attended to other household duties.



Proportion of drownings in metropolitan/suburban regions by location (58 cases in total) 1995-April 2001

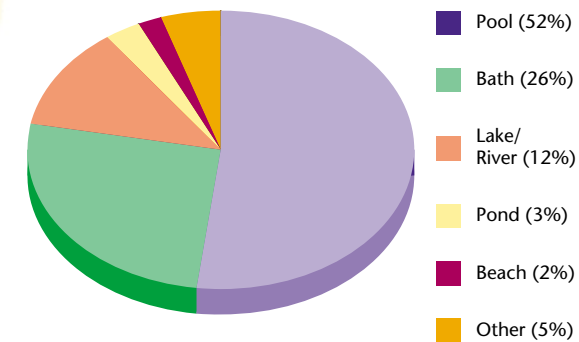
Characteristics of Drowning in bodies of Natural Water

Drowning in bodies of natural water involved children aged 2 years, and those between 3 to 5 years of age. The most common locations for drowning was dams, lakes or rivers. The two most common contributing factors to drowning in natural bodies of water were again a lack of direct adult supervision and the behaviour of the child themselves.

Dangers on Rural Properties should not be overlooked

Drowning in metropolitan/suburban areas and rural areas differ in terms of locations in which children drowned. Drowning in metropolitan areas tended to occur most frequently in pools, followed by baths, then lakes / rivers.

In contrast, drowning in rural areas tended to occur most frequently in dams, followed by lakes/rivers then pools.



Proportion of drownings in rural regions by location (20 cases in total). 1995-April 2001.

Note: In 4 cases the type of region in which the drowning occurred was unknown.