



the new south wales drowning report.

Royal Life Saving NSW

Welcome to the New South Wales 2005 Drowning Report. This report outlines information of unintentional aquatic related drowning deaths for the year 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005.

Royal Life Saving is focused on continual improvement of water safety initiatives for the prevention of drowning and near-drowning in keeping with recommendations in the National Water Safety Plan 2004-2007. Drowning and near-drowning has been recognised by State and Commonwealth governments as a priority area in injury prevention. Continual monitoring, analysis and dissemination of drowning information will assist with identifying and prioritising future prevention strategies and programs.

overview

One hundred and four (104) people lost their lives as a result of drowning / immersion incidents in NSW during the year 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005. This figure is slightly less than last year's 110 drowning deaths, yet is higher than the 5 year average of 93. The international standard for reporting death by drowning is as a rate per 100,000 of the total population. Based upon Australian Bureau of Statistics figures current as at March 2005, the NSW population was 6,764,600. This indicates a drowning rate of 1.53 per 100,000 people.

methods

Information for this report has primarily been collected through the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and supplemented with information from Coronial offices and media reports. Every effort is taken to ensure that the results are as accurate as possible at the time of printing; however, the numbers may change based on ongoing coronial investigations. It should be noted that intentional drownings (homicides and suicides) were not included in the analysis.

who is drowning?

Gender

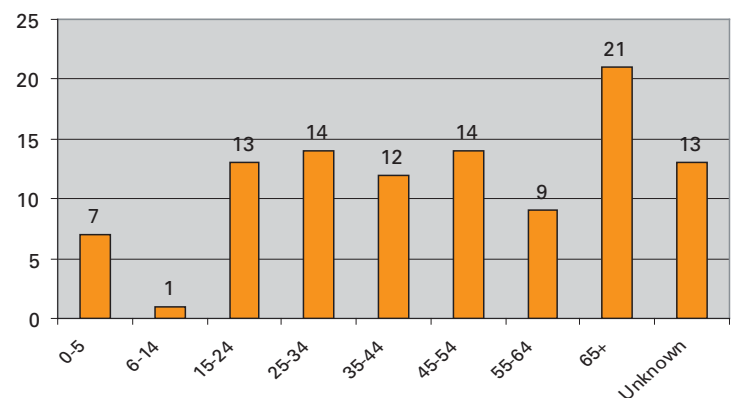
This year 76 (73%) males and 23 (22%) females drowned in NSW (5 unknown). The over-representation of males is typical of national and international injury and drowning statistics.

Age

Drownings were fairly evenly distributed across all adult age groups. There were decreases in both the 0-5 (7) and 6-14 years age groups (1) which were both below the 5 year averages (10.4 and 4). The greatest increase this year was found in the 65+ year age group, with an increase of 13 from last year. This age group needs addressing as numbers appear to be steadily increasing each year (Figure 1).

NSW Drowning by Age Group

FIGURE 1: Unintentional Drowning Deaths by Age Group, NSW, 2004/2005



cost of drowning to nsw

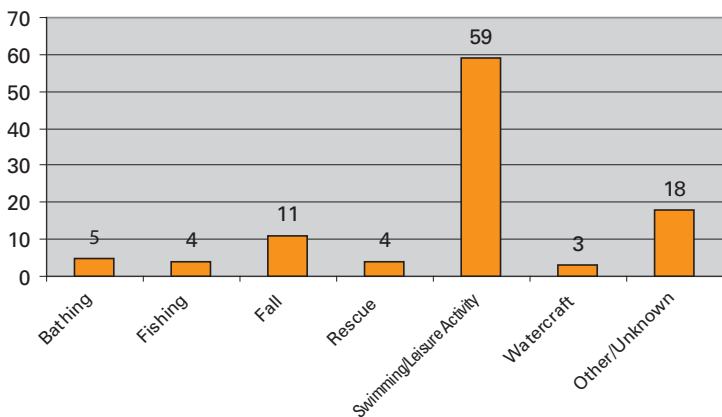
There have been a number of studies in Australia examining the lifetime cost of a drowning death. The studies show a death due to drowning comes at a cost ranging between \$370,000 and \$1.6 million to the broader community. With 104 drowning deaths the cost to the NSW community is estimated between \$38.48 million and \$166.4 million.

what where they doing?

The vast majority of drowning deaths occurred whilst undertaking some form of swimming or leisure activity 59 (56%) which matches last year's total. Unintentional falls into water contributed 11 (11%) and fishing 4 (4%) (Figure 2). Of concern are the four deaths that resulted from an individual undertaking a rescue attempt.

NSW Drowning by Activity

FIGURE 2: Drowning Deaths by Activity, NSW, 2004/2005



when are people drowning?

While summer is typically thought of as the peak season for drownings due to the warmer weather, the 2004-2005 year provided significant spring and autumn figures. Whilst the majority of drowning deaths occurred during summer 45 (43%), autumn contributed 23 deaths (22%), and spring with 21 deaths (20%). The cooler winter months still provided 15 deaths (14%) to the annual total. Care must be taken all year around, as rock fishing and bathtub drownings are more common during the winter months.

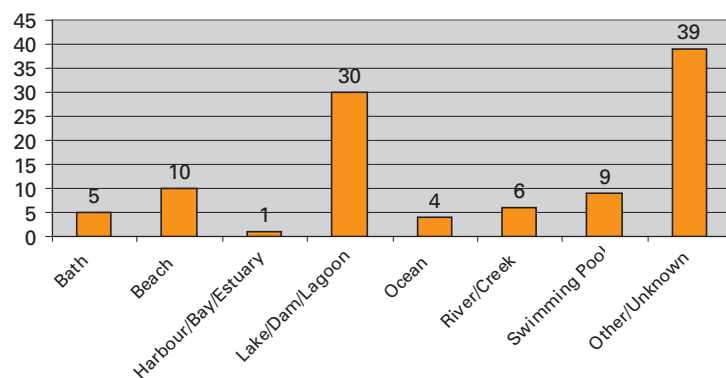
where are people drowning?

The main locations where people drown are shown in Figure 3, and include bath tubs, rivers/creeks, lakes swimming pools and beaches. In 2004/2005, the majority of people drowned in lakes/dams and rivers/creeks (36) which is a significant increase on the five-year average of 28.6. Drowning deaths in swimming pools (9) have also significantly decreased from last year's figure of 17 and is below the five-year average of 12.4.

However, there are a large number of drowning deaths (39) in which the location is either unknown or not classified from the National Coronial Information System as yet, due to lack of detail available and ongoing coronial investigations. These may in part explain why some figures are substantially lower than in previous years.

NSW Drowning by Location

FIGURE 3: Drowning Deaths by Location, NSW, 2004/2005



the 0 – 5 year age group

The 0-5 year age group is identified as one of the highest 'at risk' priority groups in the National Water Safety Plan 2004-2007. In NSW, 7 children aged 0 – 5 years drowned in 2004/2005. This reveals a significant decrease from last year's figures, in which 15 children drowned. While the decrease is encouraging, fluctuation in drowning figures is evident on a year to year basis. A five-year average provides a more tangible indication of drowning amongst children 0 – 5 years. The current five year average is 10.4 drowning per year in NSW.

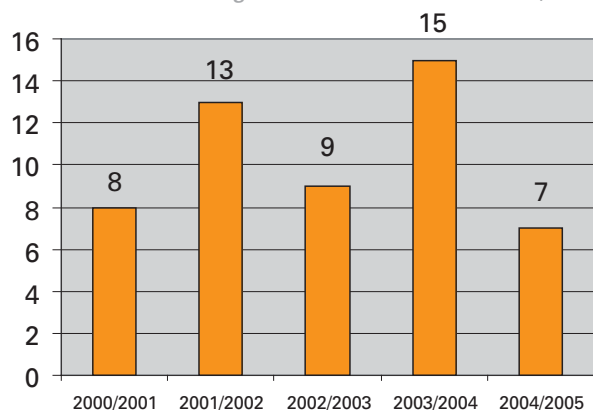
Of the seven drownings in the 0-5 year age group, three drowned in swimming pools (one was a public pool and two were home swimming pools), two in baths, one in a river/creek and one in a dam.

Four of these occurred in the Sydney Metropolitan area and three in Regional New South Wales, with the majority of these occurring during the warmer months (October through to January). Encouragingly, drowning in swimming pools this year is below the five-year average of 4.8.



NSW 0-5 year Drowning 2001- 2005

FIGURE 4: Drowning Deaths from 2001 - 2005, NSW



quick facts on nsw drowning 2004 - 2005

Children 0 – 5 years

- **7 children aged 0 – 5 years drowned**
- 2 were male, 5 were female
- 3 (43%) drownings occurred in swimming pools, 1 in a public pool and 2 in home swimming pools
- 2 (29%) occurred in the bath
- 3 (43%) fell or wandered into the water

Children 6 – 14 years

- **Only 1 child aged 6 – 14 years drowned**
- This child was female and drowned in a swimming pool

People 15 – 24 years

- **13 people aged 15- 24 years drowned**
- 11 were male, 2 were female
- 5 (38%) drowned in rivers, lakes or dams
- 9 (69%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities at the time of drowning

People 25 – 34 years

- **14 people aged 25 – 34 years drowned**
- 13 were male and 1 was female
- 7 (50%) drownings occurred in lakes, dams or lagoons, 4 (29%) people drowned at the beach
- 10 (71%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities at the time of drowning

People 35 – 44 years

- **12 people aged 35 – 44 years drowned**
- 10 were male, 2 were female
- 9 (75%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities at the time of drowning

People 45 – 54 years

- **14 people aged 45 – 54 years drowned**
- 12 were male, two were female
- 5 (36%) drownings occurred in lakes, dams or lagoons
- 4 (29%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities, 2 (14%) were fishing and 2 (14%) were attempting a rescue at the time of drowning

People 55 – 64 years

- **9 people aged 55 – 64 years drowned**
- 8 were male and 1 was a female
- 3 (33%) drownings occurred in lakes, dams or lagoons
- 6 (67%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities at the time of drowning

People 65 years +

- **21 people aged 65 year and over drowned**
- 13 were male, 8 were female
- 6 (29%) people drowned in lakes, dams or lagoons and 4 (19%) drowned in swimming pools
- 14 (67%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities at the time of drowning



current and emerging issues

Tourists

A number of drownings involved people holidaying from overseas countries including England, Ireland, Korea and Bangladesh. Appropriate drowning prevention information needs to be accessible for tourists who are unfamiliar and unaware of potential dangers at inland and beach environments.

Flooded Waterways

Waterways present many potential dangerous hazards, including the risk of drowning, especially after heavy rains and floods. Flooded waterways which may look calm on the surface are often unpredictable in terms of the depth, speed of possible currents and underwater obstacles which may be obscured from view. Caution must be exercised at all times around flooded waterways. If a water crossing is flooded, do not attempt to cross it.



artesian hot springs and bores

In the North West of New South Wales there are a number of bore baths that are popular with tourists and locals alike. These hot, naturally-occurring mineral pools may provide muscular relief and relaxation, yet there is a real danger of drowning as the baths are unfenced, unsupervised and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The accessibility of the baths, which are floodlit at night and also comprise a children's pool, pose serious safety concerns for adults and children alike.

the challenge continues...

Royal Life Saving encourages safe aquatic activities, whether at home, the local aquatic centre, beach or river environments. However, we need to be aware of the dangers around these environments and to heed water safety rules and possess knowledge and skills for safe aquatic recreation to prevent further drowning in our community. Royal Life Saving is dedicated to the prevention of aquatic related injury and death through our health promotion and training programs, public education, research and aquatic risk management services within the community.

where can i find out more about swimming and water safety?

Royal Life Saving's KEEP WATCH community health promotion program promotes a combination of actions for the prevention of drowning in young children: constant, active adult supervision (within arms reach of your child) at all times around water, participation in water familiarisation activities, creating a barrier between the water and child to restrict access (eg. pool owners must fence the pool and shut the gate) and parents should learn resuscitation.

For further information: www.keepwatch.com.au



Swim and Survive provides a broad, balanced program of swimming, water safety and survival skills in preparation for a lifetime of safe activity in, on or around the water. Swim and Survive develops swimming technique, water safety, water confidence, survival and rescue skills and endurance. For further information: www.swimandsurvive.com

Fact Sheets are available on a range of water safety topics from www.royallifesaving.com.au



acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving acknowledges the following organisations:

- The National Coroners Information System
- State Coroners
- Rehome Media
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics

citation

The Royal Life Saving Society Australia (NSW Branch 2005) The New South Wales Drowning Report 2005. New South Wales

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