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MEN THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DROWN

New statistics showing men are almost three times more likely to drown than women have prompted a warning from the Royal Life Saving Society Australia for men across all age groups to improve their water safety and swimming skills and to avoid drinking alcohol when in, on, or near the water.

The National Drowning Report 2008, which was released today, shows that 204 men drowned in Australia between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008 in a range of locations including rivers, oceans and beaches. Of those deaths, almost a quarter were young men aged 18 to 34 and most died in summer and autumn while engaging in swimming or other water-based recreational activities.

The National Drowning Report 2008 was launched by the Minister for Sport, Hon. Kate Ellis at Parliament House, Canberra today.

"In a country where swimming is a large part of everyday life and activity on and by water is so popular, it's crucial we have the right water safety programs in place," Minister Ellis said.

"It's important to remember that each statistic represents another Australian family and a real tragic story".

The other group at particularly high risk of drowning was toddlers, with 27 children aged between 0 and 5 drowning in the year to 30 June 2008. Almost 60 per cent of those children drowned in backyard pools.

"While we're pleased to see the slight reduction in overall drowning deaths, the rate at which young men and toddlers are drowning is extremely disappointing," Royal Life Saving Society Australia CEO Rob Bradley said.

"At the time the report was written, there wasn't confirmation about whether these young men had consumed alcohol immediately prior to their deaths. But we know from previous

studies that alcohol plays a role in a significant proportion of drowning deaths in that age group.

“It only takes a small amount of alcohol to slow down your reaction times, so when you get into trouble it is that much harder to save yourself. It impairs your judgment so you’re more likely to take risks. It can also disturb your sense of direction, so suddenly up is down and instead of swimming to the surface, you’re heading deeper under water.

“So our message to men, and particularly young men, is if you’re having a beer, don’t pull on your boardies.”

To tackle the alarmingly high toddler drowning deaths occurring in backyard pools, Royal Life Saving and their partners PoolWerx also launched today a national campaign aimed at making sure backyard pool fencing and the surrounding area is safe for young children.

“An increasing number of children are drowning by getting through, under or over existing pool gates and fencing that their parents believed were secure,” said Royal Life Saving CEO, Rob Bradley.

“This is a chance for everybody to make a difference. We are asking every pool owner to get out into their backyard this weekend and make sure it is safe and secure.

“Pool fencing legislation has now been in place for 10 to 15 years and many fences and gates have badly deteriorated. Recent local government surveys have shown that up to 85 per cent of home pools do not comply with safety standards. That’s a frightening statistic.

“By using our practical, easy to read checklist home pool owners will be able to check, fix and maintain their home pool environment.

“With small children supervision is also vital because children drown silently and quickly. Unlike adults, they don’t splash, they don’t scream, they don’t make any sounds that would alert you, so you need to keep them within arm’s reach when they are in, on, or around water.”

Mr. Bradley also stressed the importance of learning CPR and doing regular refresher courses every two years to ensure, in the event you need to use CPR, you have the skills to save a life. He urged anyone who was wanted to learn CPR or do a refresher course to contact their State or Territory Royal Life Saving office on 1300 737 763 for information on courses.

To download your free copy of the checklist, go to www.homepoolsafety.com.au

This is the 15th annual drowning report released by the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia.

The National Drowning Report 2008 can be found at www.royallifesaving.com.au.

Information for the Drowning Report is primarily collected from the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and media reports.

For further information, or to set up an interview please contact:

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Background:

Royal Life Saving Society Australia has been serving Australia for over 110 years and is the leading water safety, swimming and lifesaving education organisation in Australia. Royal Life Saving is dedicated to turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. We achieve this through: education; training; health promotion; aquatic risk management; community development; sport and participation; advocacy; research; and international networks. Royal Life Saving has branches in every State and Territory in Australia.

For more information about Royal Life Saving, visit our website at www.royallifesaving.com.au

Facts at a glance:

Young children 0-4 Years

- 27 young children 0-4 years (10% of all drowning deaths)
- 18 (67%) were males
- 16 (59%) in swimming pools
- 24 (89%) fell or wandered into water
- 11 (41%) occurred during summer

Children 5-14 Years

- 13 children 5-14 years (5% of all drowning deaths)
- 9 (69%) were males
- 4 (31%) at lakes/dams/lagoons
- 3 (23%) in rivers
- 6 (46%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water
- 5 (38%) following a fall into water
- 6 (46%) occurred during the summer

People 15-34 Years

- 67 people 15-34 years (26% of all drowning deaths)
- 56 (84%) were males
- 17 (25%) at the beach
- 16 (24%) in a river
- 26 (39%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 10 (15%) following a fall into water
- 10 (15%) while using watercraft
- 30 (45%) occurred during the summer

People 35-54 Years

- 80 people 35-54 years (30% of all drowning deaths)
- 62 (78%) were males
- 24 (30%) in a river
- 20 (25%) in ocean/harbour locations
- 17 (21%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 11 (14%) were using watercraft prior to drowning
- 21 (26%) occurred during summer

People 55+ years

- 66 people aged 55 years (25% of all drowning deaths)
- 52 (79%) were males
- 12 (18%) in a river
- 10 (15%) at the beach
- 11 (17%) in a swimming pool
- 16 (24%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 11 (17%) following a fall into water
- 23 (35%) occurred during summer

Note: There were 8 cases (3% of all drowning deaths) where the age was unknown at the time of production of this report.