

SINCE 1990



THE DROWNING CHALLENGE

The good news is that fewer Canadians are drowning than 10 years ago. By 1998 (the most recent year for which national data is available), there were 551 drownings and preventable water-related deaths, well down from the high water marks of 683 and 685 fatalities in 1990 and 1993 respectively (see chart #1).

It is also encouraging to see fewer drownings happening among young children under 5 years of age (see chart #2), young men 18 to 34 years of age (see chart #2), and recreational boaters (see chart #3). These high risk groups have been the primary targets of the Lifesaving Society's Water Smart® public education campaign since 1990.

The bad news is that drowning is still the second leading cause of unintentional death for Canadians under 65 years of age, only exceeded by motor vehicle collisions. The great tragedy is that so many of these deaths are preventable. Drowning prevention is a long-term commitment for the Lifesaving Society.

The "Unattended Toddler" Profile

- 1 to 4 years old—can walk, but can't swim.
- Playing near water and falls in.
- Alone, or momentary lapse in parent or caregiver's attention.
- Not wearing a lifejacket.
- Drown, or suffer near-drowning brain damage.
- Backyard pools particularly dangerous; also bathtub, cottages, and unsupervised waterfronts.

The "Risk Taker" Profile

- Young men 18 to 34 years, active in outdoor recreational activities, especially fishing, powerboating, swimming, canoeing, and snowmobiling, who put themselves into high risk situations.
- Often partying with friends, including drinking alcoholic beverages.
- Almost never wearing a lifejacket or PFD, and may be guilty of careless driving of their boat or snowmobile.
- Usually on open water—lakes, rivers, ocean.

To further reduce drownings in Canada, the Lifesaving Society recommends that:

- All Canadians wear their lifejackets or PFD's when boating or travelling on ice.
- Boat and snowmobile operators should not drink alcoholic beverages.
- Operators of powerboats and personal watercraft need to get trained in boating safety.
- Parents should closely supervise young children in, on, or around water.
- All Canadians should learn rescue skills.

CHART #1
Canadian Drownings Trending Down
Preventable Water-Related Deaths
and Death Rates - Canada: 1990 - 1998

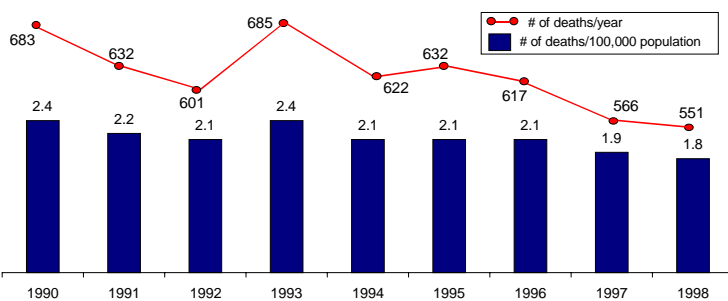
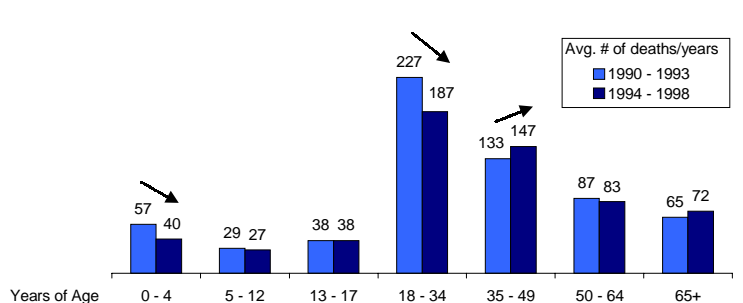


CHART #2
Fewer Drownings Among Young Children & Young Adults
Number of Preventable Water-Related Deaths/Year
by Age Group - Canada: 1990 - 1993 vs 1994 - 1998



Desperate Rescue Attempt Fails to save Toddler

It was a tragic end to a holiday weekend camping trip. The 2 ½ -year-old girl's father paced nervously along the beach looking for his daughter. She was not wearing a life-jacket. Seconds later, two men pulled the little girl from the lake and rushed to shore, shouting for help. Rescuers tried to breathe life back into her tiny body. Sadly, without success.

Lifejackets Do Save Lives!

Three boaters were about 2.5 km from shore when their 18-foot boat started taking on water. They ended up in the water and started swimming toward a boat anchored off a point, yelling for help. Fortunately the trio were wearing their lifejackets.

The people in the anchored boat heard their cries for help and responded. After spending one hour in the water, the victims were finally pulled to safety, suffering only from mild hypothermia and a bad scare.

"HE WAS SUCH A GOOD SWIMMER...I NEVER THOUGHT ANYTHING WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM"

WHO IS DROWNING?

- Men—83% of drowning victims are male, making men four times more likely to drown than women.
- All age groups, but especially under 5 years and 18 to 34 years of age.
- Trend toward fewer drownings among toddlers under 5 years (-30% in 1994-1998 compared to 1990-1993; see chart #2).
- Trend toward fewer young adults 18 to 34 years drowning (-18%; see chart #2).

"ONE MINUTE SHE WAS PLAYING BY THE POOL... THE NEXT MINUTE SHE WAS GONE"

WHAT WERE THEY DOING?

- Boating (34% of fatalities); In-water Aquatic activities (21%) such as swimming; Transportation (17%) involving motor vehicle or plane crashes; and Other Near-water Non-aquatic activities (19%), such as walking or playing near water.
- Usually Recreational (62%) or Daily Living (24%) activities; few Occupational fatalities (7%).
- Highest incidence recreational activities are swimming, sport fishing, and powerboating (see chart #3).
- Trend toward fewer boating deaths (-14% in 1994-1998 vs. 1990-1993), especially recreational powerboating (-28%) and sport fishing(-18%) (see chart #3).
- Also trend toward fewer drownings while playing near water, walking near water, and playing in water (see chart #3), which often involves toddler victims.
- Most often, boating victims drowned while operating a small powerboat. However, there is a trend toward fewer small powerboat drownings (-20% in 1994-1998 compared to 1990-1993).
- Despite a rapid increase in popularity of Personal Watercraft, there has not been a corresponding increase in PWC-related fatalities.

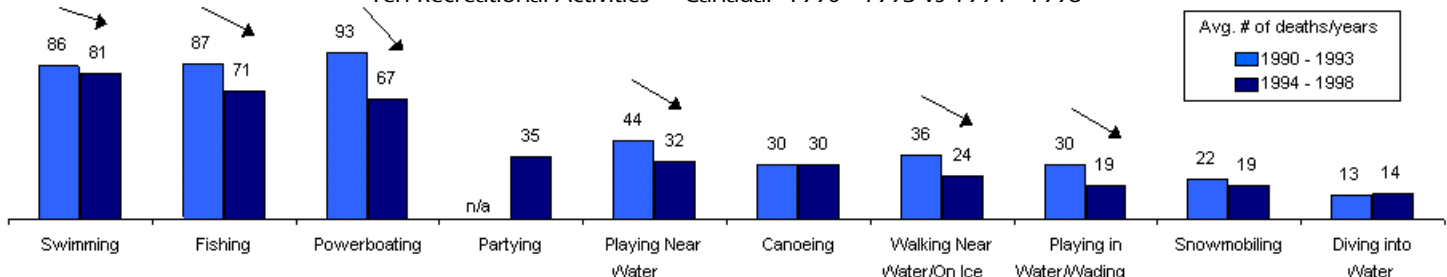
"WE'D HAD A FEW BEERS. IT DIDN'T SEEM THAT ROUGH, BUT THE NEXT THING WE KNEW, THE WAVES WERE COMING OVER THE BOW AND THE BOAT WAS SWAMPED"

CHART #3

Recreational Drownings Down, Especially Powerboating and Sport Fishing

Number of Preventable Water-Related Deaths/Year for Top

Ten Recreational Activities - Canada: 1990 - 1993 vs 1994 - 1998



THE RISK FACTORS

- 1. Not wearing a lifejacket or PFD** continues to be a major problem with recreational boaters.
 - Victim was not wearing a PFD in two-thirds of recreational powerboating, sport fishing, and canoeing incidents, which usually involved capsizing, swamping, or falling overboard.
 - PFD not even present in the boat in one-third of sport fishing and canoeing fatalities.
- 2. Drinking alcoholic beverages is a major problem with boaters and snowmobilers.**
 - Alcoholic beverage consumption involved in 42% of preventable water-related deaths involving victims 18+ years of age. Although no long-term trend has been measured, it is positive to note that alcohol was only involved in 36% of 1998 incidents involving adult victims.
 - Alcoholic beverages involved in half of recreational powerboating deaths and two-thirds of snowmobiling drownings.
- 3. Lack of supervision of young children.**
 - 60% of children under 5 years were alone when they drowned.
- 4. Rough water.**
 - Rough water/waves cited in 29% of boating fatalities; capsizing or swamping involved in half of boating deaths.
- 5. Cold water.**
 - 20% of all drownings known to involve water 10 degrees Celsius or colder.
 - Hypothermia cited as a cause of death by Coroners & Medical Examiners in 11% of deaths.
- 6. Snowmobiling on ice after dark.**
 - Two-thirds of snowmobiling drownings occurred after dark.

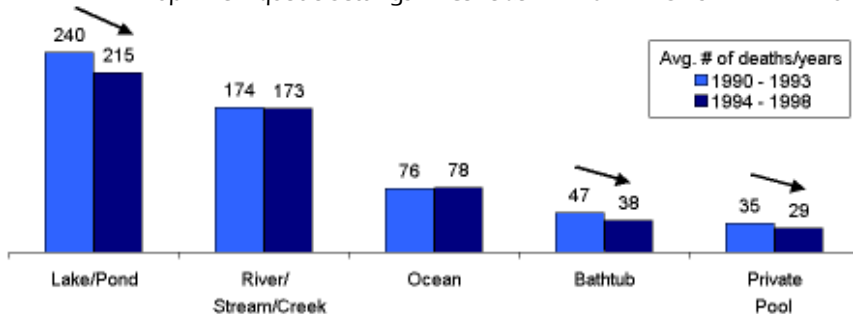


"I CAN HANDLE IT... IT WON'T HAPPEN TO ME"

CHART #4

Fewer Lake, Bathtub & Pool Drownings

Number of Preventable Water-Related Deaths/Year
Top Five Aquatic Settings - Canada: 1990 - 1993 vs 1994 - 1998



"HE DOVE IN, AND HE JUST NEVER CAME UP"

WHERE WERE THEY?

- Usually on lakes and ponds (36% of 1990-1998 fatalities), or rivers and streams (28%) (see chart # 4).
- Trend toward fewer lake/pond drownings (-10% for 1994-1998 compared to 1990-1993), reflects fewer fatal boating incidents.
- Also less bathtub (-19%) and private pool (-17%) deaths, reflecting fewer toddler drownings.
- Regionally, the biggest trends toward fewer drownings since 1990 have been in Ontario and British Columbia.

"I ONLY TURNED MY BACK FOR AN INSTANT"

Drowning Often a Quick, Quiet, Event for Non-Swimmers

The father and mother were less than five feet away from their four-year-old daughter. Yet she still slipped beneath the surface of the water, struggling to regain her footing. Fortunately her father was "within arms reach," scooping her up, as she coughed out a mouthful of water. If he hadn't been so close at hand, it could have turned out very differently.

Lifeguard Saves Two Men!

As the lifeguard scanned the busy beach, he saw someone swim from the raft to meet another man swimming from shore. The two men were struggling. The lifeguard grabbed his paddleboard and headed out to help them.

When he got there, one man was in a panic. The lifeguard secured him on the paddleboard. The man told him his friend had gone down underneath them. The lifeguard instantly dove and found the other victim—ten feet under and unconscious. Brought to the surface, the victim was breathing, but still unconscious.

Monitoring the victim's vital signs, the lifeguard brought him to shore, with assistance from bystanders. The man began to regain consciousness on shore a few minutes later.

HOW TO BE WATER SMART®...

AND AVOID BECOMING A DROWNING VICTIM

1) ALWAYS WEAR A LIFEJACKET!

Don't just have it in the boat. Choose it and use it.

2) BOAT SOBER & RIDE SOBER!

Don't drink and drive your boat or snowmobile.

3) GET TRAINED IN BOATING SAFETY!

The Lifesaving Society's Boat Operator Accredited Training® course (BOAT) is available at participating recreation departments and other aquatic facilities.

4) KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!

Check the weather forecast. Take a few minutes with a simple safety checklist before heading out.

5) DRIVE YOUR POWERBOAT, PWC, OR SNOWMOBILE RESPONSIBLY!

6) WEAR A FLOTATION SUIT & DON'T DRIVE YOUR SNOWMOBILE ON THIN ICE!

7) ALWAYS CLOSELY SUPERVISE YOUNG CHILDREN NEAR WATER!

8) ALWAYS SWIM WITH A BUDDY!

And play and swim in areas supervised by a lifeguard.

9) PROTECT YOUR NECK!

Feet first, first time. Never dive into shallow water.

10) LEARN TO SWIM & LEARN LIFESAVING SKILLS!

Go further... take a Lifesaving Society Canadian Swim Patrol, Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, National Lifeguard Service, or other lifesaving program at your local pool or aquatic facility.

SUMMARY FACTS & FIGURES

Canadian Preventable Water-Related Deaths: 1990 - 1998 Nine-Year Totals

TOTAL	# (% of Total)	WHEN	TYPE OF CRAFT	# (% of Boating)
WHO	5589 (100)	Month of Year:		
Age of Victim:				
0 - 4 years	424 (8)	May - June	Powerboat	
5 - 12	252 (5)	July - August	- small (5.5m and under)	658 (34)
13 - 17	338 (6)	September - October	- large (over 5.5m)	270 (14)
18 - 34	1841 (33)	November - April	- size unknown	200 (10)
35 - 49	1265 (23)		- personal watercraft	42 (2)
50 - 64	763 (14)		- Total Powerboats	1170 (61)
65 +	622 (11)		Canoe	338 (18)
Gender of Victim:			Sailboat	52 (3)
Male	4593 (83)		Rowboat*	60 (4)
Female	950 (17)			
WHERE			WHY	
Aquatic Setting:			Contributing Factors*:	
Lake/Pond	2036 (36)		(% of Boating) (% of Total)	
River/Stream	1564 (28)		Alcohol Involved	(40) (36)
Ocean	694 (12)		After Dark	(21) (21)
Bathub	377 (7)		Alone	(24) (40)
Private Pools	287 (5)		With Others	(75) (57)
Province/Territory:			Cold Water	
Nfld and Labrador	256 (5)		<10 degrees Celsius	(25) (20)
Nova Scotia	278 (5)		PFD:	
Prince Edward Island	36 (1)		Not worn (properly)	(64)
New Brunswick	174 (3)		Not present	(25)
Quebec	1117 (20)		Worn (properly)	(12)
Ontario	1580 (28)		Fell or thrown overboard	(28)
Manitoba	280 (5)		Capsized	(36)
Saskatchewan	231 (4)		Swamped	(15)
Alberta	346 (6)		Rough Water	(29)
British Columbia	1158 (21)		Standing up in craft	(11)
N.W.T. & Nunavut*	94 (2)		Overloaded craft	(10)
Yukon*	35 (1)		Collisions	(8)
		DOING WHAT		
		Type of Activity:		
		Recreational		
		Occupational		
		Daily Living		
		Boating		
		Aquatic & Bathing*		
		Non-Aquatic*		
		Specific Recreational Activities:		
		# (% of Recr. Deaths)		
		Swimming		
		Fishing		
		Powerboating		
		Partying**		
		Playing Near Water		
		Canoeing		
		Walking Near Water/On Ice		
		Playing in Water/Wading		
		Snowmobiling		
		Diving/Jumping		
		Commercial Fishing		
		(% of Occup. Deaths)		
		Daily Living Boat Travel		
		(% of D.L. Deaths)		

* = 8 years data (1991-1998); ** = 3 years data (1996-1998)

For more information, contact the:

Lifesaving Society

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E-Mail: experts@lifesaving.ca

Or contact the Lifesaving Society office in your province or territory.

The Lifesaving Society and the Canadian Red Cross Society collaborate to collect drowning data from the offices of the Chief Coroners and Medical Examiners in each province and territory.



The Lifesaving Society is Canada's lifeguarding expert. The Society is a national, volunteer-based charitable organization working to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, drowning research, Water Smart® public education, and aquatic safety management services.