



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

THE NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT

2000 Edition

NEW LOW FOR CANADIAN DROWNINGS

Fewer Canadians drowned in 1998 than in previous years. Overall there were 551 drownings and preventable water-related deaths in 1998 (the most recent year for which new data is available). This is the lowest total in the nine years since the LIFESAVING SOCIETY began tracking Canadian drowning statistics in 1990. The 1998 total is down by 3% from the previous low recorded a year earlier (see chart #1), and down by 20% from the high water mark of 685 fatalities only five years earlier in 1993.

Taking Canadian population growth into consideration, the preventable water-related death rate also dropped in 1998, to 1.8 deaths per 100,000 population (see chart #1). This is encouraging, as it is the second year in a row that the death rate has been held below the 2.1 to 2.4 range of prior years. It is also impressive because 1998 was a very warm, dry year, which created very positive climate conditions for Canadians' participation in water-based recreation. In the past, the number of water-related deaths has tended to rebound upward in "fair weather" years; however this was not the case in 1998.

Environment Canada reported that 1998 was in fact the warmest year this century—for the year as a whole, and for the Spring, Summer and Autumn

seasons in particular. It was also a drier than normal Summer and year from Ontario to the West coast, further fueling the potential for water-based recreational activity.

By province, nine-year lows were recorded in British Columbia, Ontario and New Brunswick. Most other provinces and territories experienced fewer or similar numbers of fatalities in 1998 as in previous years. Only Alberta and Newfoundland bucked the trend, with more water-related deaths in 1998.

Quebec fatalities increased from the low of 1997, but were still below the long-term average (see chart #2).

By type of activity, boating fatalities reached a nine-year low, staying below 200 deaths for the second year in a row (see chart # 6). There were also fewer water-related deaths during recreational activities for the third year in a row.

There are also signs of progress on several risk factors that have been a focus of the LIFESAVING SOCIETY's Water Smart™ public education campaign.

In 1998, there were 52 fewer deaths involving alcoholic beverages than the average of the previous 5 years. There

were also fewer 1998 deaths where the victim was alone, especially among older children, teens and young adults, and fewer fatal incidents occurring after dark.

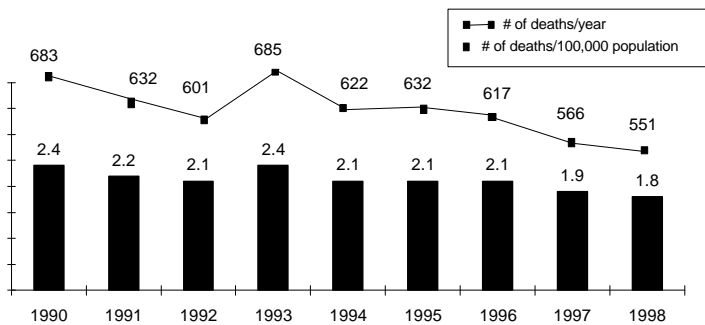
While these are encouraging signs, drowning prevention is a long-term proposition, requiring constant, ongoing efforts to encourage Water Smart™ behaviour amongst Canadians. In particular, more Canadians need to wear their lifejackets or PFD's (Personal Flotation Device), as far too many victims still drown in situations where a PFD could have saved their life. As well, youngsters need to be constantly supervised near backyard pools.

Initiatives such as the new federal recreational boating safety regulations, which are being phased in over a ten year period, starting in September 1999, and the LIFESAVING SOCIETY's new B.O.A.T.™ (Boat Operator Accredited Training) safety course will help further reduce the drowning toll.

As well, the SOCIETY's lifesaving and lifeguarding training programs teach Canadians the skills needed to rescue themselves and others, so that they can avoid becoming drowning statistics.

'98 CANADIAN DROWNINGS DOWN TO 9-YEAR LOW

Chart #1: Preventable Water-Related Deaths and Death Rates - Canada: 1990 - 1998



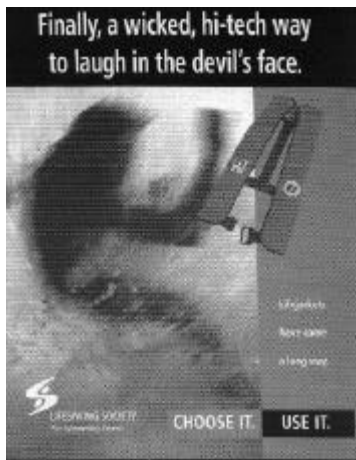
NEW LOWS IN NEW BRUNSWICK, ONTARIO, B.C.

Chart #2: Number of Preventable Water-Related Deaths By Province & Territory - Canada: 1992 - 1998

	1992 - 1996		
	Avg/Yr	1997	1998
Nfld & Labrador	28	27	31
N.S.	31	38	28
P.E.I.	4	5	3
N.B.	21	19	12
Quebec	131	105	119
Ontario	174	147	141
Manitoba	31	34	26
Sask.	25	28	24
Alberta	34	38	45
B.C.	131	118	112
N.W.T.	14	5	8
Yukon	6	2	2
Canada	631	566	551

FEWER "PRIME-OF-LIFE" ADULT DROWNINGS

Fewer adults between 25 and 49 years of age drowned during 1998 than previous years. This reflected fewer boating deaths in this age group, particularly for recreational powerboating and fishing. The decrease was particularly pronounced among 25 to 34-year-olds, with only 86 fatalities in this age group (see chart # 3), which is 20% lower than any previous year. This brought the water-related death rate for 25 to 34-year-olds down to 1.9 deaths per 100,000 population, the first time it has dipped below 2.0.



YOUNG RISK-TAKERS NOT WEARING PFD'S

After a dip in 1997, the number of water-related deaths among teens 13 to 17 years of age was back up in 1998, closer to historical levels. Deaths among young adults 18 to 24 years of age also rebounded in 1998 (see chart #3). The preventable water-related death rate among 18 to 24-year-olds reached 3.0 deaths per 100,000 population, 67% higher than the 1.8 average for all age groups combined. On the positive side, there were fewer deaths in this age group involving alcoholic beverage consumption. However, more teen and 18 to 24-year-old victims drowned who were not wearing PFD's; 42 victims between 13 and 24 years of age died in 1998 in relevant situations where a PFD was not worn and may have saved their life (eg. boating, snowmobiling incidents). This was 50% higher than the average number of "PFD not worn" deaths in previous years for 13 to 24-year-olds.

NEW LOWS FOR PLEASURE BOATING & CANOEING DROWNINGS

For the third successive year, fewer water-related deaths occurred during recreational activities in 1998 (see chart #4). There is also a long-term trend toward fewer incidents during daily living and occupational activities.

Among specific activities, there was a sharp drop in recreational powerboating and canoeing fatalities during 1998 (see chart #5). This reflected fewer incidents involving

alcohol (39% in 1998 vs. close to half in prior years), and fewer fatal incidents after dark. However not wearing a PFD continues to be a major problem for pleasure boaters. About two-thirds of 1998 recreational powerboating (74%) and canoeing (61%) victims were not wearing a PFD when their fatal incident occurred, which usually involved capsizing, swamping or falling overboard.

Among other recreational activities, fatalities while swimming and playing in water bounced back to higher levels in 1998 (see chart #5). This likely reflects greater in-water recreational participation, given the warm, dry weather conditions prevalent during 1998.

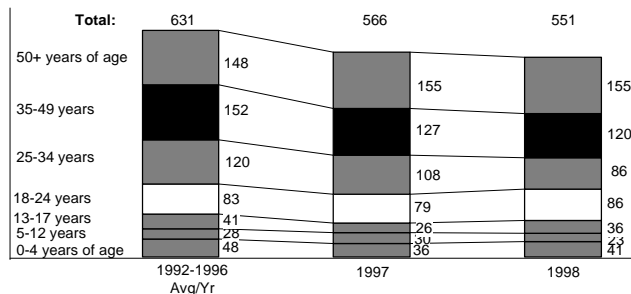
There was also a resurgence in water-related recreational snowmobiling fatalities in 1998. Unlike boating, there was more alcoholic beverage involvement in 1998 snowmobiling fatalities (76% of deaths) than in prior years (62%). As well, the lack of wearing PFD's or flotation suits continues to be a major factor in water-related snowmobiling deaths. In 1998, only 1 of the 25 snowmobiling victims was wearing such protection.

NINE-YEAR LOW FOR BOATING FATALITIES

The 187 total boating fatalities in 1998 (see chart # 6) was the lowest total in the past 9 years. There were fewer fatalities involving small powerboats (5.5 meters and under).

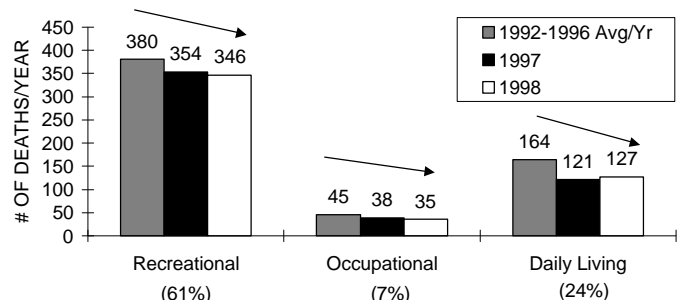
FEWER DROWNINGS AMONG ADULTS 25-49 YEARS

Chart #3: Number of Preventable Water-Related Deaths By Age Group - Canada: 1992 - 1998



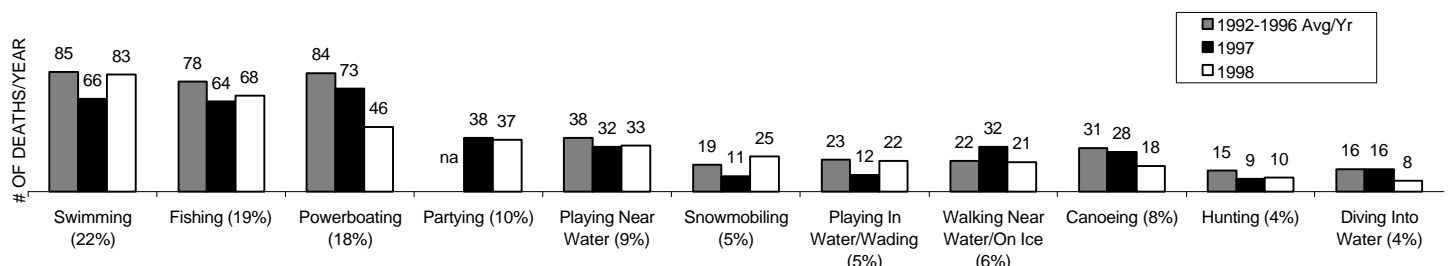
NEW LOW FOR RECREATIONAL DROWNINGS IN '98

Chart #4: Preventable Water-Related Deaths By Purpose of Activity - Canada: 1992 - 1998



POWERBOATING & CANOEING DROWNINGS DROP IN '98

Chart #5: Top Recreational Activities In Preventable Water-Related Deaths - Canada: 1992 - 1998



Although small powerboats still accounted for the largest absolute number of fatalities of any type of craft, the 1998 total of 46 deaths was down by more than 30% from previous years. There was much lower alcohol involvement in small powerboat fatalities in 1998 (33% of deaths) than prior years (46%). Among other types of craft, there were also fewer fatalities in 1998 than prior years for canoes.

Seven deaths during 1998 involved personal watercraft—similar to the 8 deaths recorded for PWC's in 1997. High-risk behaviour was evident, with 5 of the 7 incidents during 1998 involving alcoholic beverage consumption, and 6 of 7 involving victims not wearing PFD's. All of the 1998 victims were men between 18 and 49 years of age; 5 of 7 were under 35 years old.

ALCOHOL & NOT WEARING PFD'S ARE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING RISK FACTORS

Not surprisingly, drowning is identified by coroners and medical examiners as the primary cause of death in over 90% of preventable water-related deaths. Taking secondary contributing factors into consideration, coroners identify alcohol intoxication and not wearing a PFD as the next two most frequent contributing causes, followed by exposure to cold/hypothermia.

Overall, alcoholic beverage consumption has been involved in 36% of preventable water-related deaths over the past 5 years, making it a major contributing risk factor. On a positive note, only 32% of 1998 fatalities involved alcohol. In the absolute, there were 52 fewer alcohol-related deaths in 1998 than the average of the prior 5 years. With the overall number of water-related deaths also down in 1998, this reinforces the LIFESAVING SOCIETY's desire to reduce alcohol consumption on the water, to in turn contribute to reducing drownings in Canada.

Not wearing PFD's has also been a major risk factor. Almost half (42%) of water-related deaths occurred in incidents where a PFD could have been worn. No PFD was worn in two-thirds (65%) of boating fatalities and there was not even a PFD present in the boat in one-quarter (25%) of boating deaths. No PFD or flotation suit was present or worn in half of snowmobiling fatalities.

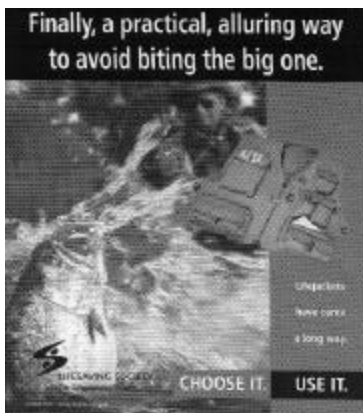
POWERBOATS AND PERSONAL WATERCRAFT MORE DEADLY THAN UNPOWERED CRAFT

The Canadian Coast Guard estimates that between 8 and 10 million Canadians go boating in Canada each year. In 1996, it was estimated there were 2.6 million boats in Canada for pleasure and recreation use. Almost half (45%) were powerboats (1.2 million) and one-third were canoes and kayaks (about 1 million).

By type of craft, powerboats account for the bulk of the absolute number of recreational boating water-related deaths. Relative to the number of craft, the water-related death rate for powerboats, at 7 deaths per 100,000 boats, is higher than for unpowered craft (ie. canoes, rowboats, sailboats), at 2 to 4 deaths per 100,000 boats. Although there are relatively few personal watercraft (about 50,000 in 1996), the 1998 water-related death rate was higher for these intensively used craft, at 10 water-related deaths per 100,000 craft.

BACKYARD POOLS BUCK THE TREND TOWARD FEWER DROWNINGS

There were fewer water-related deaths in most major aquatic settings in 1998 (see chart #7). However, private pool drownings were up, the bulk of which are residential backyard pool incidents. Almost half (45%) of these backyard pool victims are toddlers and young children under 5 years of age. These young victims are usually playing alone near the pool, when they fall in and drown in an instant, even if the lapse in supervision was only for a few moments.

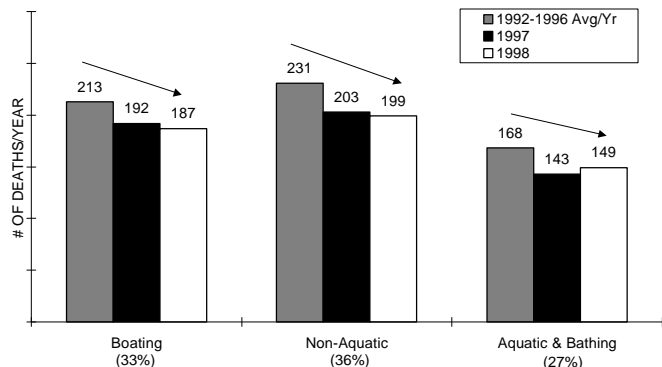


	'000's of Boats for Pleasure Use-1996 ¹	Avg.# of Recr. Boating W-R Deaths per year: 1994-1998	W-R Death Rate - # of Deaths/100,000 Boats
Powerboats	1,182	85	7
Personal Watercraft (PWC's)	52	5	10
Canoes & Kayaks	965	37	4
Sailboats	124	5	4
Rowboats	294	7	2
Total	2,617	150	5.7

Notes: 1. Estimated number of boats for pleasure use sourced from Canadian Coast Guard 1996 research study "Small Vessels Inventory in Canada". Includes boats in private Canadian households and boats rented for pleasure/recreational use. Estimates are ±12%.

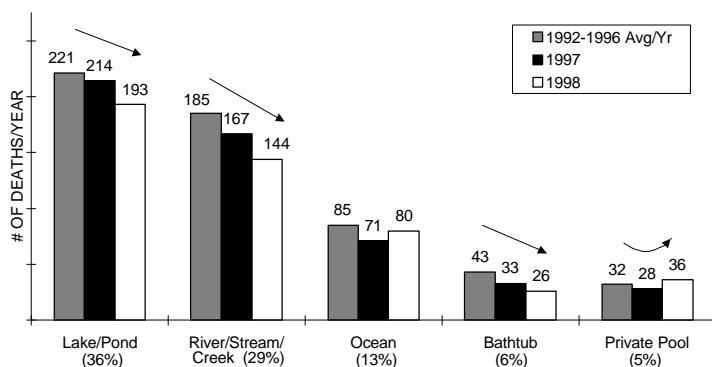
NEW LOW FOR BOATING DEATHS IN '98

Chart #6: Preventable Water-Related Deaths By Type of Activity - Canada: 1992 - 1998



BACKYARD POOL DROWNINGS REBOUND IN '98

Chart #7: Top Five Aquatic Settings Where Preventable Water-Related Deaths Occur - Canada: 1992 - 1998



DO YOU KNOW HOW TO BE WATER SMART™?

BE A WATER SMART™ BOATER...

1) **KNOW THE BOATING "RULES OF THE ROAD"!**
More details available from the Canadian Coast Guard (www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca), but you should know that the rules changed as of September 1999:

- No child under 12 years of age may operate a powerboat with more than a 10 HP motor.
- Youths 12 to 15 years of age may only operate a boat with a motor over 40 HP if accompanied and directly supervised by someone 16 years or older.
- Minimum age for operating a personal watercraft (PWC) is 16 years of age.
- New small vessel safety equipment and safety precautions requirements for boaters include a new "careless operation of a vessel" offence which requires boaters to travel safely and avoid putting themselves and others at risk.
- Operators of powerboats must be accredited with proof of operator competency. As of September 1999, this applies to any person under 16 years. As of September 2002, applies to any person operating a powerboat less than 4 metres, including PWC's. As of September 2009, applies to all operators of all powerboats and PWC's.

2) **GET TRAINED ON BOATING SAFETY!**

- Not only to get your boat operator "licence", but because it's the Water Smart™ thing to do!
- Youth and adults can take the LIFESAVING SOCIETY's B.O.A.T.™ (Boat Operator Accredited Training) safety course at your local pool or aquatic facility.

3) **KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!**

- Avoid potential danger by taking a few minutes with a simple checklist ... What's the weather forecast? Any local hazards? Have your maps or charts? Have your PFD's? Have your first aid kit, tools and spare parts? Safety equipment all working? Have enough fuel? Have you let someone know where you are going and when to expect you back?

4) **ALWAYS WEAR A LIFEJACKET!**

- Don't just have it in the boat, pick one and **wear** it ... only 5% of Canadian drowning victims were wearing a lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD) properly; half or more of victims in powerboats, canoes, rowboats, sailboats, kayaks and personal watercraft were not wearing PFD's.

5) **WEAR THE RIGHT GEAR!**

- Your PFD of course, but also good sunglasses and appropriate clothing.
- Paddles, whistles and flares are the right gear too.

6) **BOAT SOBER ... DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE YOUR BOAT!**

- Alcohol intensifies the effect of fatigue, sun, wind and boat motion to adversely affect your balance, judgment and reaction time.
- Alcohol is involved in 36% of all preventable water-related fatalities and half or more of snowmobiling, boat travel and recreational powerboating deaths.

7) **DRIVE YOUR POWERBOAT OR PWC RESPONSIBLY!**

- Look before you act, stay low, drive at moderate speeds, be aware of changing weather conditions, and drive with extreme caution and proper lights after dark.
- Capsizing, swamping or falling overboard involved in three-quarters of boating fatalities.

BE WATER SMART™ ON ICE...

8) **DON'T WALK, PLAY OR SNOWMOBILE ON THIN OR UNKNOWN ICE!**

9) **RIDE SOBER, WEAR A FLOTATION SUIT AND DON'T DRIVE YOUR SNOWMOBILE ON ICE AFTER DARK!**

10) **LEARN MORE ABOUT ICE SAFETY AND ICE RESCUE...** Get the LIFESAVING SOCIETY's ice safety resource guide "Ice: The Winter Killer".

BE A WATER SMART™ SWIMMER...

11) **LEARN TO SWIM!**

12) **NEVER DIVE INTO SHALLOW WATER!**

13) **DON'T GO IN THE WATER ALONE! ...Always swim with a buddy.**

14) **ALWAYS SUPERVISE YOUNG CHILDREN NEAR WATER! ...If you're not within arm's reach, you've gone too far!**

15) **PLAY AND SWIM IN SUPERVISED AREAS!**

16) **LEARN LIFESAVING SKILLS!**

- Go further... Take a LIFESAVING SOCIETY Canadian Swim Patrol, Bronze Star, Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, National Lifeguard Service or other lifesaving program at your local pool or aquatic facility.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Or contact the Lifesaving Society
Branch office in your
province/territory.

The Lifesaving Society acknowledges assistance in preparing The National Drowning Report from:

- Offices of the Chief Coroners and Medical Examiners in each province
- Canadian Red Cross Society (CRCS)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
- Canadian Coast Guard
- Think First Canada
- Environment Canada
- Lifesaving Society and CRCS volunteers and staff



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

The Lifesaving Society is a national volunteer-based, charitable organization which works to prevent drownings through its training programs, public education, research, consulting and international liaison.