

THE IMPORTANCE OF WEARING A LIFE JACKET

While Canadians start preparing for the summer season and planning water related recreational activities, the warmer days also mark the beginning of a season known for water-related injuries and fatalities. As we prepare, it is important to educate ourselves, and our loved ones on water safety. The National Summer Safety Week was held earlier this month to remind Canadians of the importance of wearing a life jacket.

For many families, summer includes activities such as swimming and boating. But each year, approximately 525 Canadians fall victim to tragic water-related accidents ending in a fatality. A Canadian Red Cross report examining these fatalities revealed many common factors:

Children aged 1-4 and men 15-34 most at risk for water-related fatalities.

On average, there are 97 deaths a year from unexpected falls into water.

80% of fatalities involving children in backyard pools occurred when there was no adult supervision.

From 1991 to 2008, an average of 167 people died each year in boating mishaps. Of these, nine out of 10 are not wearing their life jackets, or were wearing them incorrectly.

FREQUENT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LIFE JACKETS

"I don't need a life jacket because I'm a strong swimmer."

Every year, even strong swimmers drown. Where swimming ability was recorded by coroners, almost half of those who died in fatal boating incidents were average to strong swimmers, according to the Canadian Red Cross. Even a confident swimmer can be quickly overwhelmed by factors such as the weight of waterlogged clothing, the disorientation and panic of an unexpected plunge, exhaustion from swimming against a strong current, and the numbing effects of cold water.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WEARING A LIFE JACKET

"Only boating newbies need to wear life jackets."

Unfortunately, years of boating experience do not affect your ability to float. If anything, the more time you spend in a boat, the more likely you are to encounter unforeseen circumstances, and the greater benefit you will reap from a habit of properly wearing your life jacket. Of boating fatalities where boating experience was known, 66 per cent were recorded as experienced boaters, and only 34 per cent were occasional or inexperienced boaters.

"I only need my life jacket in a bad weather."

Boating mishaps are actually more common when the weather is good and waters are calm. Survivors of near-drownings frequently recall how an otherwise unexceptional task or activity quickly went awry.

Sources:

Canada Safety Council

The Canadian Red Cross