

THE 2005 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DROWNING REPORT



Royal Life Saving

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

**EVERYONE
CAN BE A
LIFESAVER**

Of the drownings in 2005:

- 79% were male
- 47% occurred in regional areas
- 32% were aged 30-59 years
- 61% occurred in coastal locations
- 29% occurred while fishing
- 21% were under the influence of Alcohol and other drugs
- 32% had pre-existing medical conditions

Between January 1st and December 31st 2005, a total of 38 people drowned in Western Australia



Between January 1st and December 31st 2005, a total of 38 people drowned in Western Australia. Of these 34 were classified as unintentional deaths and the remaining 4 were cases that were intentional or the cause was undetermined. This is 11 more unintentional drowning deaths than 2004. This report only analyses unintentional deaths.

In Western Australia during 2005, the cost of drowning to the broader community amounted to \$54.4 million (\$1.6 million per drowning death).

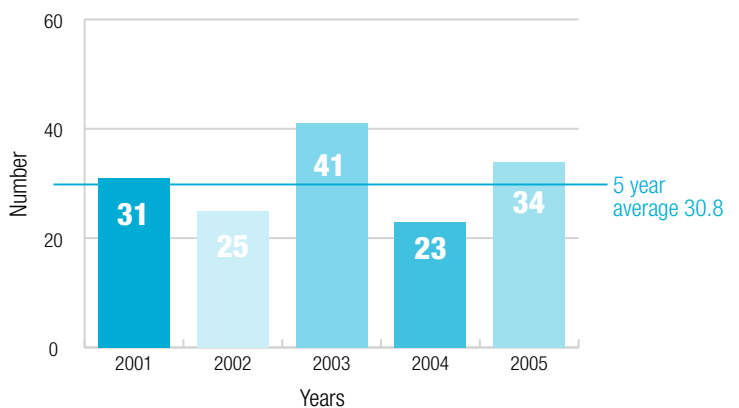
**Reference: Adapted from Hendrie, 2003 statistics*

Drowning over the past 5 years in Western Australia...

The average number of drowning deaths per year for the past five years, 2001-2005 is 30.8. The 2005 figure is slightly higher than this average.

In Western Australia during 2005, the cost of drowning amounted to \$54.4 million

Total Drowning Deaths 2001-2005



The Western Australian population as of December 2005 was 2, 028,700 (ABS). Therefore, the corresponding rate of drowning for 2005 was 1.7 deaths per 100,000.

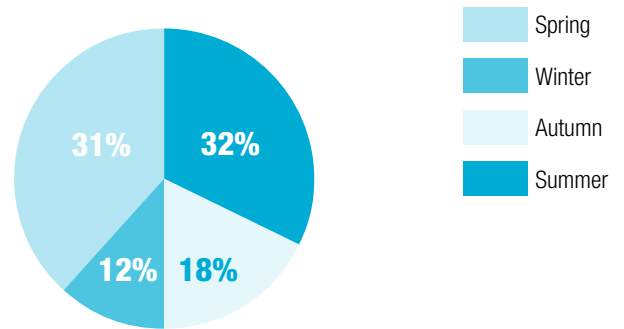
47% of drowning deaths occurred in regional and remote areas of Western Australia



Drowning by Season

38% of drowning deaths in 2005 occurred during the Spring months with 13 deaths recorded, followed by 11 in Summer and 6 in Autumn. While the majority of drowning deaths occurred in the warmer months, there is an increasing number occurring during Winter and Autumn, highlighting the need for vigilance all year round.

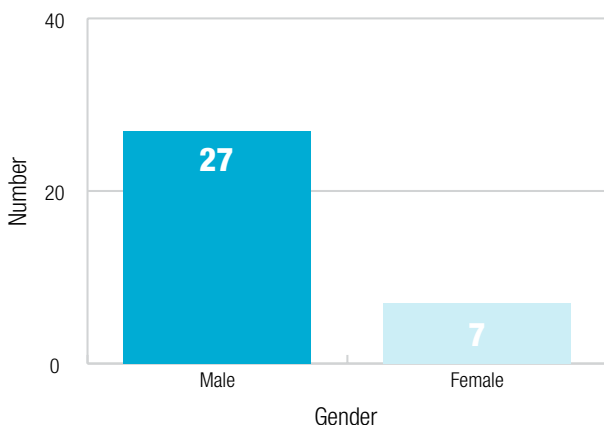
Drowning by Season 2005



Drowning by Gender

Of the 34 unintentional drowning deaths recorded in Western Australia in 2005, 27 (79%) were males and 7 (21%) were females. The over-representation of males in drowning statistics is consistent with national figures.

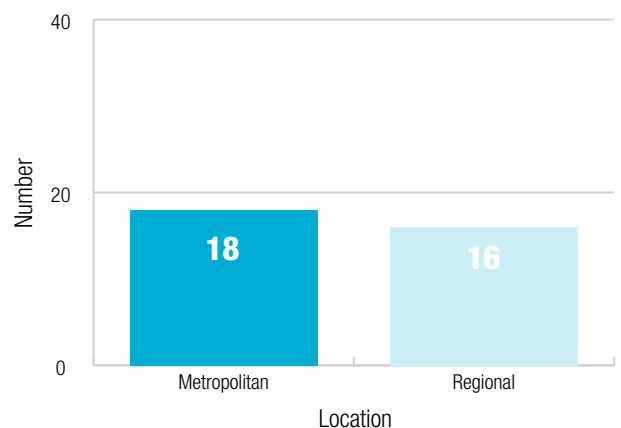
Drowning by Gender 2005



Metropolitan versus Regional

47% of recorded drowning deaths occurred in regional and remote areas of Western Australia in 2005. Given the population distribution within Western Australia, this group is over-represented in drowning statistics. This highlights the need for further drowning prevention interventions and programs in regional and remote areas of the state.

Metropolitan versus Regional Drowning 2005





Infants and Toddlers (0 – 5 years)

Infant and Toddler drowning has been identified as the number one Key Priority Area by the National Water Safety Plan (National Water Safety Council, 2004) and based on data collected over the past decade, one child under five years drowns every week in Australia. Infant and Toddler drowning is one of the primary focus areas for the Royal Life Saving Society's drowning prevention programs.

Six infants and toddlers aged 0-5 years drowned in Western Australia in 2005, representing 18% of total drowning deaths. This figure, while an increase from 2004 is still lower than the five year average for drowning deaths among this age group.

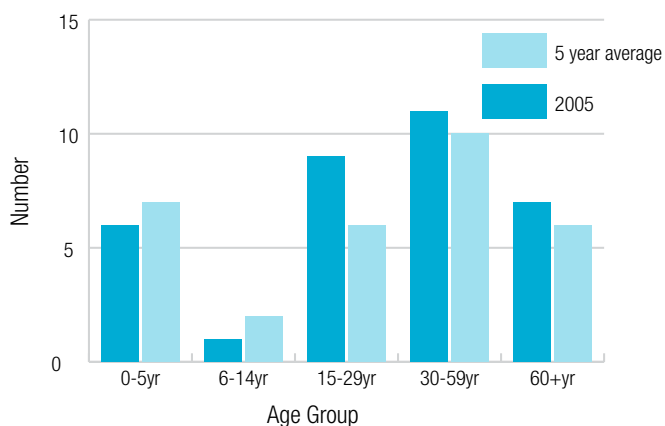
The majority of drowning incidents in this age group occurred in home swimming pools (33%). Other locations included fishponds, bathtubs, soak wells and dams. A lack or lapse of active supervision and inadequate or faulty barriers to water bodies were common contributing factors in the majority of incidents.

Drowning deaths within this age group continue to highlight the need for constant supervision by parents and carers of young children and the need to properly install and maintain barriers to water bodies, particularly in and around the home.

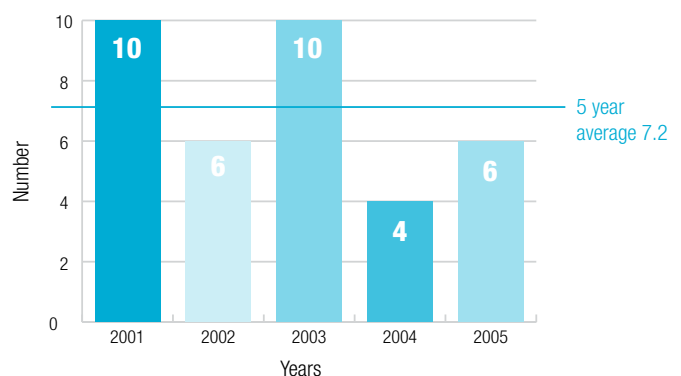
Drowning by Age

Drowning continues to remain the leading cause of preventable death in children under five years of age. Drowning among adults aged 30-59 years remained high in 2005, representing 32% of all drowning deaths. Young adults aged 15-29 years have emerged as a group at high risk, recording the highest number of drowning deaths seen over the past 5 years for this age group.

Drowning by Age 2005



Drowning of Infants and Toddlers (0-5 years)

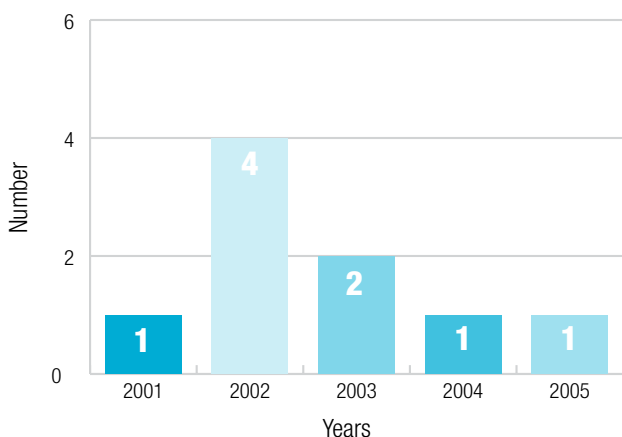


Children (6-14 years)

There was one reported drowning incident among this age group in 2005. This continues the decreasing trend in drowning deaths amongst this age group that has emerged over the past few years.

This is perhaps one of the greatest achievements in drowning prevention in Australia, due to the continual success of swimming and lifesaving programs such as Swim and Survive and the creation of initiatives such as Watch Around Water. The drowning rates among children aged 6-14 years are the lowest levels of any age group.

Drowning of Childrens (6-14 years)



Emerging Adults (15-29 years)

There were nine drowning deaths recorded among this age group in 2005, four more than in 2004. The majority of these incidents involved males, which is a common trend in injury statistics among this age group. Young adults accounted for 26% of the total number of drowning deaths in Western Australia in 2005.

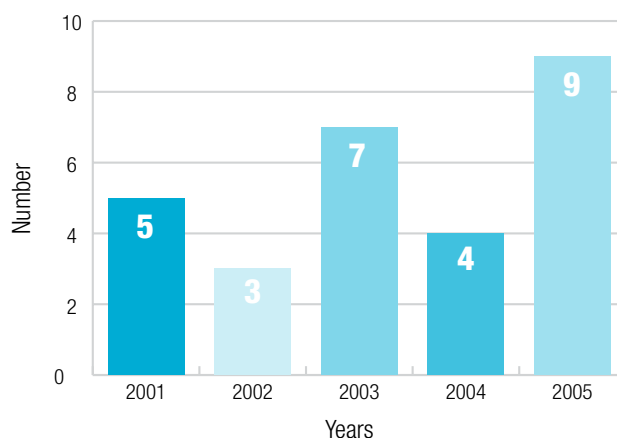
Drowning deaths amongst this age group predominately occurred in coastal locations (67%), including beaches and oceans.

Fishing was the most common activity being undertaken at the time of the incident (44%). Boating, bathing and swimming were other activities undertaken.

Alcohol and other drugs were a contributing factor in 44% of incidents among this age group. All of these incidents also involved the individual participating in risky behaviours in and around a water environment.

The presence of medical conditions have also emerged as a common contributing factor to drowning deaths among emerging adults in 2005, and were present in 44% of incidents.

Drowning of Emerging Adults (15-29 years)





Adults (30-59 years)

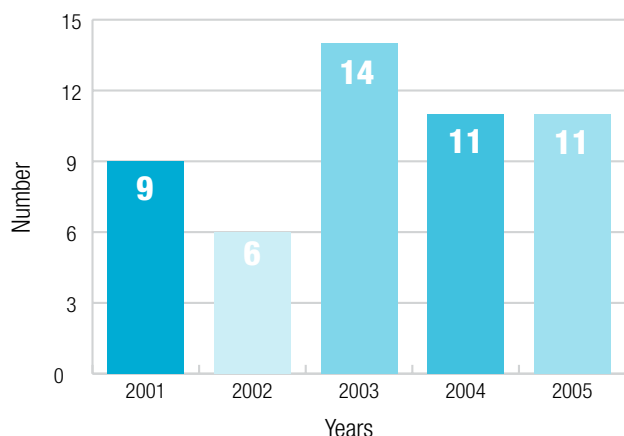
Adults aged 30-59 years again recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in 2005, accounting for 32% of total drowning deaths in Western Australia.

The majority of incidents occurred at coastal locations (73%), with the most common activity being undertaken at the time of the incident being boating (36%) followed by fishing, swimming and diving (18% each).

Common contributing factors to these incidents included poor signage at the locations, the use of inappropriate equipment and sudden changes in weather conditions.

These incidents highlight the need for education to improve the awareness and knowledge of appropriate equipment, particularly safety equipment and the importance of assessing the weather conditions both prior to and during aquatic activities.

Drowning of Adults (30-59 years)



Older Adults (60+ years)

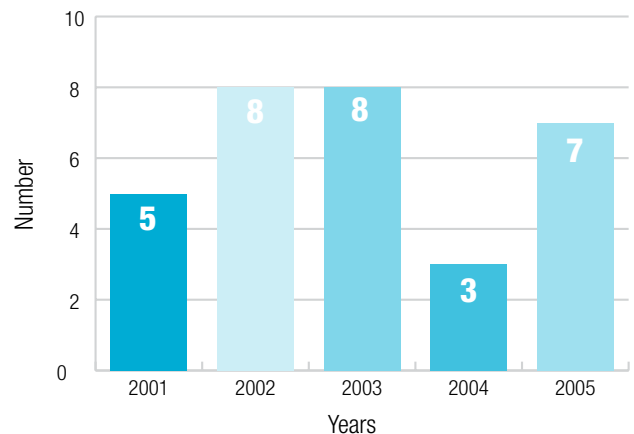
Seven older adults drowned in 2005, four more than were recorded in 2004. This age group has emerged as being at a high risk of drowning in Western Australia.

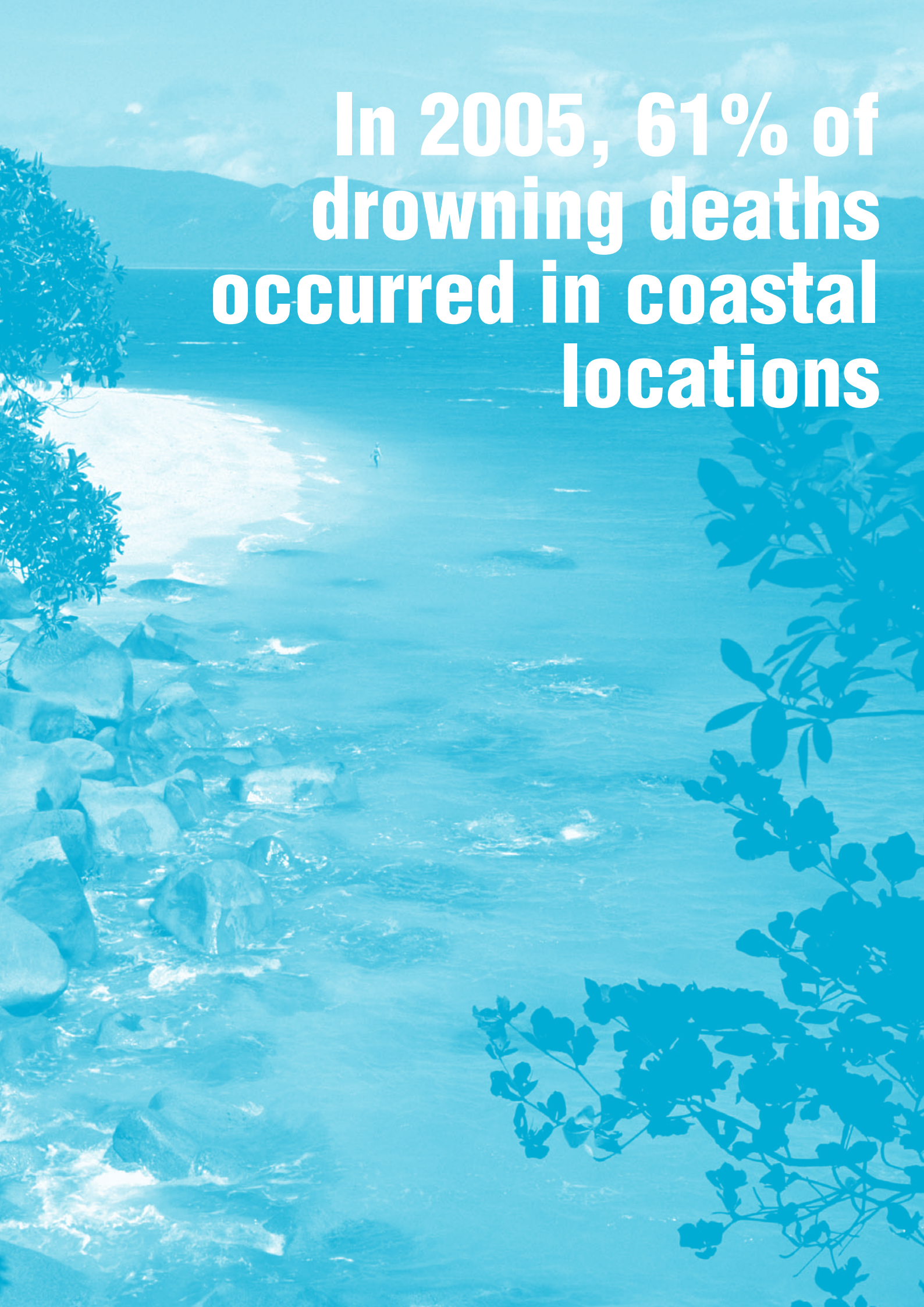
All incidents amongst this age group occurred at coastal locations. The majority of incidents occurred while fishing (57%), followed by boating and swimming. Medical conditions also contributed to many of the drowning incidents recorded in this age group.

Other contributing factors included the use of inappropriate safety equipment, changes in weather conditions and people being unaware and unfamiliar with their surroundings.

These incidents highlight the need for older adults to be aware of the conditions and their own capabilities, particularly those with medical conditions that place them at an increased risk when recreating around water.

Drowning of Older Adults (60+ years)



A coastal scene with a rocky shore, waves, and a person in the water, overlaid with a blue tint and white text. The text is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

**In 2005, 61% of
drowning deaths
occurred in coastal
locations**



Coastal Locations – Oceans and Beaches

21 (61%) people drowned in coastal locations in 2005, more than any other location. Of all coastal locations, beaches were associated with the greatest number of drowning deaths.

All incidents that occurred in coastal locations involved people aged 15 years and older.

Activities commonly involved with incidents occurring in coastal locations included fishing, in particular rock-fishing, boating, diving, swimming and surfing.

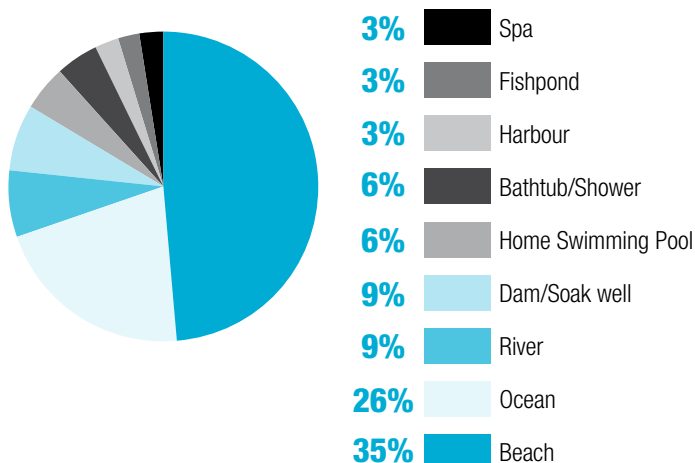
Poor conditions, consumption of alcohol, use of inappropriate safety equipment and risky behaviour were factors which contributed to the incidents.

The majority of the incidents involved poor conditions and sudden changes in weather causing conditions to deteriorate quickly. This highlights the need for greater education and awareness of the importance of carrying appropriate safety equipment and on the risks and dangers associated with the coastline and how to react to and avoid these risks.

Drowning by location...

Drowning occurs in three broad types of locations – coastal, inland and home locations. Coastal locations include beaches and oceans. Inland locations include public swimming pools, dams, soak wells, rivers, harbours and estuaries. Home locations include home swimming pools, fishponds, bathtubs and spas.

Drowning by Location 2005



Inland Locations – Rivers, Harbours and Dams/Soak Wells

Inland waterways accounted for 21% of total drowning deaths in 2005. The majority of incidents occurred in rivers and dams/soak wells (43% each) followed by harbours.

All drowning deaths that occurred in inland waterways involved people less than 60 years of age, with the majority amongst the 30-59 year age group. Swimming, boating and recreating around water environments were the most common activities being undertaken at the time of these incidents.

Lack of adequate supervision and inappropriate barriers to water bodies were common contributing factors for drownings amongst toddlers and children in these locations. The presence of medical conditions, the use of alcohol and other drugs and the use of inappropriate equipment were common contributing factors among older victims.

These incidents highlight the importance of constant adult supervision of toddlers and children both in and around the water and of having suitable barriers to all water bodies, not just home swimming pools. They also highlight the need for education on the risks and dangers associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs and participation in recreational aquatic activities.



Home Locations – Home Swimming Pool, Fishponds and Baths/Showers

Almost one in six of all drowning deaths occurred in and around the home in 2005, in locations including the home swimming pool, fishponds, baths and showers.

While majority of these incidents involved young children and toddlers, there were a number of incidents which occurred in baths and showers involving young adults aged 15-29 years. All of these were contributed to by pre-existing medical conditions.

Home swimming pools remains a common location for drowning deaths of children and toddlers. Lack of adequate supervision and inappropriate or poorly maintained barriers to water locations were key contributing factors to these incidents.

Again, these incidents highlight the need for adequate supervision of toddlers and young children in and around the water and given the newly amended pool fencing legislation announced earlier this year, the installation and maintenance of barriers to all water locations around the home.

Drowning by Activity...

Drowning deaths in 2005, occurred while victims were participating in a range of aquatic activities including swimming, fishing, boating, diving, bathing and surfing.

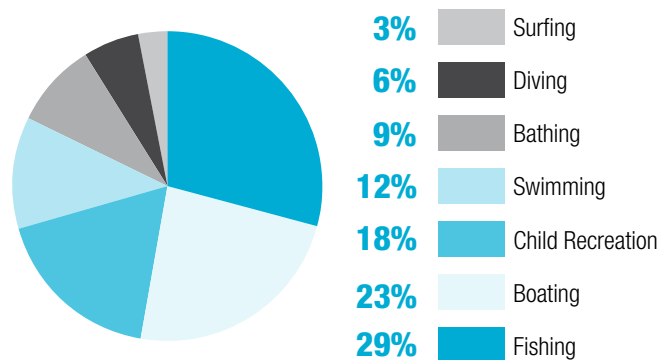
Numerous drowning deaths occurred when the victim was participating in activities around aquatic environments and unintentionally entered the water. This type of incident has been termed 'recreating around water'.

Fishing emerged as the most common activity (29%) involved in drowning incidents in 2005. Fishing related drowning deaths included fishing from rocks, abalone fishing and

crabbing. These incidents were usually caused by lack of knowledge and awareness of surrounding conditions and changes in weather conditions. Other contributing factors included people fishing by themselves and participating in risky behaviours.

Boating has also emerged as a priority issue for drowning prevention initiatives. Many of these incidents involved the use of inappropriate safety equipment and sudden changes in weather conditions.

Drowning by Activity 2005



There was a slight increase in the number of drowning deaths involving children recreating around water compared to 2004, however there seems to be an overall decrease when comparing statistics from the past five years. This suggests that toddler drowning prevention programs are beginning to have an impact on behaviour.

However, these incidents also indicate the importance of continuing these programs to educate parents and carers of young children on what constitutes adequate supervision in and around aquatic environments to ensure this trend continues.

**29% of drowning
deaths in 2005 involved
recreational fishing**





Drowning by contributing factors...

There were a range of factors which contributed to the occurrence of drowning deaths in 2005. These include the use of alcohol and other drugs and the presence of medical conditions.

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Seven drowning deaths were contributed to by alcohol consumption and/or use of other drugs in 2005, four more than 2004. This represents 21% of total drowning deaths and 25% of drownings amongst those aged 15 years and older.

The use of alcohol and other drugs and participation in aquatic-based activities was most prevalent among emerging adults aged 15-29 years, contributing to 44% of drowning deaths among this age-group.

Medical Conditions

The presence of medical conditions were contributing factors in 32% of total drowning deaths in 2005, a slight increase from 2004. Common contributing medical conditions included epilepsy and heart disease.

Epilepsy was more likely to be a contributing factor among young children and particularly among emerging adults (44%). Forms of heart disease were more likely to be a contributing factor amongst drowning deaths in older adults.

Those affected by medical conditions need to be aware of their limitations in and around the water and where possible should participate with a competent carer.

High Risk Populations

Indigenous Population

Two Indigenous Western Australians drowned in 2005. This highlights the need to continue the provision of culturally appropriate swimming, lifesaving and education programs to all Western Australians.

CALD Groups

Two Western Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds drowned in 2005. This is a decrease from 2004, however still emphasises the importance of continuing to encourage those from CALD backgrounds to participate in swimming and lifesaving programs.

Recommendations

- Toddler Drowning Prevention programs should continue to target parents and carers, with an emphasis on educating the target group on what constitutes adequate supervision. This will assist in continuing the decreasing trend of drowning deaths among toddlers and young children.
- Educational programs targeting young adult males aged 15-29 years should be continued. Programs should focus on the risks and dangers associated with the consumption of alcohol and participation in aquatic activity and how they can reduce their risk of injury, drowning and near-drowning.
- Fishing has emerged as an activity commonly involved in drowning deaths in Western Australia. Education and awareness campaigns should be developed addressing all forms of recreational fishing and implemented throughout Western Australia.
- Coastal locations have also emerged as a priority area for drowning prevention. Programs and interventions should target activities undertaken in these locations.
- Swimming, lifesaving and public education and awareness programs which are culturally appropriate for different population groups within Western Australia should be continued.

References

1. Hendrie, D. (2005) *Injury in Western Australia: The Costs of Accidental Drowning and Near Drowning in Western Australia*. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government
2. Australian Water Safety Council (2004) *National Water Safety Plan*. Sydney, New South Wales.

Royal Life Saving Society

Drowning Prevention Initiatives



KEEP WATCH

KEEP WATCH is a health promotion program, supported by the Department of Health that aims to prevent toddler drowning through increased knowledge and awareness of parents, pool owners, health professionals, and community and child care workers. The KEEP WATCH message promotes four key toddler drowning prevention messages:

- Supervise your child - within arms reach
- Restrict your child's access to water
- Familiarise your child with the water
- Learn resuscitation

Check out www.keepwatch.com.au.



Home Pool Inspection Program

The Royal Life Saving Society conducts home pool inspections on behalf of a number of local government organisations. The Home Pool Inspection program specifically works toward the second KEEP WATCH strategy - Restrict your child's access to water.

To see if your pool complies with state legislation check out www.poolsafety.com.au.



Infant Aquatics

The infant aquatics program is an education and skill development program aimed at encouraging infants and toddlers to explore and practice aquatic skills at their own pace in a safe aquatic environment. The Infant Aquatics program specifically works toward the third KEEP WATCH strategy – Familiarise your child with the water.



Heart Beat Club

The Heart Beat Club is an informal resuscitation program that aims to develop life-saving resuscitation skills in our community. The Heart Beat Club specifically works toward the fourth KEEP WATCH strategy – Learn Resuscitation.



Swim And Survive

The Swim And Survive program facilitates the delivery of swimming and water safety education throughout Australia, through advocacy for the importance of swimming and water safety programs, the provision of assistance to swimming and water safety providers to deliver safe and well-balanced aquatic programs, and the provision of ongoing research and program development.

Check out www.swimandsurvive.com.au

Royal Life Saving Society Drowning Prevention Initiatives



Bronze Rescue

The Bronze Rescue builds on the Swim and Survive program, giving young people the right knowledge and skills to help them and those around them survive in an aquatic emergency.



Junior Lifeguard Club

The Junior Lifeguard Club enable kids to become involved in lifesaving as a sport, providing an avenue to keep kids interested and active in aquatic sports.



RISE

The Recreation Industry Skills Education offers a range of swimming, lifesaving and first aid instruction. Check out www.rise.com.au



RASPP

The Remote Aboriginal Swimming Pools Project is a joint initiative of Royal Life Saving Society and the Department of Housing and Works supported by BHP Billiton.



The Project aims to provide well maintained, well supervised aquatic facilities and programs that promote regular participation in aquatic activity amongst the remote Western Australian Aboriginal communities they operate within.



Watch Around Water

The Watch Around Water program is a joint initiative developed by the Royal Life Saving Society, LIWA Aquatics and the Aquatics Industry. The program aims to encourage parents to adequately supervise their child whilst in aquatic centres. The campaign addresses the misconception that it is the sole responsibility of the lifeguard to supervise children.



Don't Drink and Drown

Don't Drink and Drown is a joint initiative of Royal Life Saving Society and Surf Life Saving, with support from the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation. The Project aims to reduce the incidence of alcohol related injury and death in aquatic environments amongst 15 to 29 year olds.

Other Activities

Royal Life Saving also maintains an extensive network with community and industry stakeholders, providing ongoing advice and consultation to ensure the organisation meets the needs and expectations of the Western Australian community.

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Nimmo. L, McNamara. J & Hazell. F (2006) 2005 Western Australian Drowning Report. The Royal Life Saving Society – WA Branch, Perth, Western Australia.

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Disclaimer: While all care is taken to ensure that the results presented in this report are as accurate as possible, they are only provisional and may change due to ongoing coronial investigations.