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## INFORMATION BULLETIN

For Immediate Release  
[release number]  
June 21, 2018

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
BC Coroners Service

### Summer water safety tips

VICTORIA - With summer now officially here and warm weather in the forecast for much of the province, the BC Coroners Service is urging residents and visitors to take extra care when they are near rivers, lakes or the ocean.

While preliminary data from 2016 show a decline in the number of accidental drownings, the BC Coroners Service is already investigating a drowning incident this month. Statistics collected by the Coroners Service consistently show a spike in drowning deaths each summer, with the numbers beginning to increase in May and continuing to rise through August.

“All boaters and paddlers should wear a personal floatation device (PFD), not just have one in the boat with them,” said chief coroner Lisa Lapointe. “Additionally, children, non-swimmers and weak swimmers should wear a PFD anytime they’re in or near the water. People don’t realize how quickly they can get into trouble – particularly when they’re in unfamiliar waters.”

The Coroners Service emphasizes the need for visitors from other countries, or even other regions, to understand the dangers that may lurk in or near B.C.’s lakes and rivers. These include sudden drop-offs into deep water, unexpectedly cold water temperatures, unexpected underwater obstacles and unstable or slippery rock edges above cliffs and waterfalls. Waters in B.C. are also frequently much colder than in other countries or provinces. If you are hosting someone from out of town, be sure to warn them of these potential hazards.

A further key point is to avoid mixing alcohol with swimming, boating or any water-based activity. Impairment greatly increases the chances of an accidental drowning.

“This is the time of year when we see too many carefree days on the water turn to tragedy due to alcohol, poor judgement or a momentary lapse in supervision of children,” says Lifesaving Society Executive Director, Dale Miller. “Although figures are improving, we are working toward a province free from drowning.”

Data from 2016 showed a total of 47 accidental drownings, the lowest number in the past decade, down from 80 in 2015. More than one-third of those deaths occurred in the southern Interior region of B.C.

The latest Coroners Report on accidental drownings can be found at:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/death-investigation/statistical-reports> (under Recreational Deaths)

### Quick Facts

- In any small craft wear a properly-fitted personal floatation device (PFD) at all times when on the water. Having one in the boat is not sufficient as, in as many as 70% of boating incidents, the person becomes separated from the boat.
- Children, non-swimmers and weak swimmers should also wear a PFD when wading or playing in the water at a river or lakeside.

- Do not mix alcohol with boating, swimming or other recreational water activities. A study published in the journal, Injury Prevention, suggests that someone with a blood-alcohol level of 0.10 has about 10 times the risk of drowning during boating, and that even a small amount of alcohol can increase the risk as a result of impaired co-ordination and judgment. Impairment is illegal for someone driving a boat, but it is also a risk for passengers who are more likely to fall into the water. Impairment by alcohol or drugs is also often a contributing factor in cases in which someone has accidentally fallen into water from shore.
- Be aware of the water conditions where you are planning your activities. Check the weather forecast before heading out and also do a visual inspection of the area. Do not head down a river without being aware of the water conditions further downstream. If there are warning signs posted, obey them.
- If you are hosting visitors from another province or country, ensure that they are informed about the conditions that prevail in the lake or river you are visiting. Warn them about steep drop-offs, rapids, currents, cold water and any other hazards.
- Always supervise children anywhere near water. Pre-school-aged children can drown in only a few centimetres of water and drowning is often silent. Young children should be within arm's reach of a responsible adult. Swim lessons do not replace the need to supervise children around the water.
- Never dive into unknown waters. Unexpectedly shallow water or hidden obstacles underwater can easily prove fatal. Diving from cliffs or from other great heights is exceptionally risky.
- Never swim alone. Always have a buddy and keep an eye out for each other.

#### **Learn More:**

For further information about water safety tips, visit the following sites:

- Canadian Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/swimming-and-water-safety-tips-and-resources/swimming--boating-and-water-safety-tips>
- The Lifesaving Society: <http://www.lifesaving.bc.ca/boating-safety-tips-33-languages>

National Drowning Prevention Week (July 15-21, 2018): <http://www.lifesaving.bc.ca/events/2012-07-21/national-drowning-prevention-week>

#### **Contact:**

Andy Watson  
 Manager, Strategic Communications  
 BC Coroners Service  
 250-356-9253  
<http://www.gov.bc.ca/coroners/>

Dale Miller  
 Executive Director  
 Lifesaving Society – BC & Yukon  
 604-299-5450 or 604-341-7475 cell  
<http://www.lifesaving.bc.ca/boating-safety-tips-33-languages>

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