



PRESS RELEASE

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Drownings by suicide - a tragedy that wreaks distress nationwide. WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY: 10 September Irish Water Safety offers hope for the future by engaging children today...

World Suicide Prevention Day on 10 September 2011 promotes worldwide commitment and action to prevent suicides. In global terms, there is one suicide death every 40 seconds - about 3,000 people daily - and for every person who completes a suicide, 20 or more may attempt to end their lives.

Irish Water Safety has developed a long-term strategy to help reduce the tragically high number of suicide drownings in Ireland and calls on parents and guardians nationwide to take the following steps to help Irish Water Safety reduce drownings by suicide in the long-term. But first the tragic tide of statistics:

Drowning suicides – the tragic statistics:

- 51 people drowned by suicide in 2010;
- Of the 75 Male drownings in 2010, 30 were suicides and a further 17 were of undetermined cause and may have been suicides*.
- Of the 37 female drownings in 2010, 21 were suicides and a further 11 were of undetermined cause and may have been suicides*.
- In 2010, the ages of drowning suicide fatalities peaked for those aged in their mid-fifties to mid-sixties (13). Equally high are those in their mid-thirties to mid-forties (10) and mid-forties to mid-fifties (9). Ten drowned aged 34 and under; nine drowned aged 65 and over.
- An average of 68 people drowned by suicide each year in the decade to 2010. This figure is much higher when we include the rising number of drownings whose cause is undetermined, an average of 25 per annum and rising*.
- Drowning suicides by Province in 2010: Leinster: 20; Munster: 17; Connacht: 10; Ulster (part of): 4;
- Drowning suicides through the decades – a tragic trend (average each year):
 - 1970's: 35; 1980's: 75; 1990's: 100; 00's: 68.

*Undetermined Cause or open verdict reflects the decision made by a Coroner. Undetermined cause has risen in the last decade from a low of 10 in 2002 to a high of 45 in 2009. The figure for 2010 was 28.

Drowning suicides – Irish Water Safety's suicide prevention initiatives:

There is one positive step that parents and guardians can take to help Irish Water Safety in its long-term drive to reduce drownings by suicide, that being to enrol children in Irish Water Safety's "Primary Aquatics Water Safety" (PAWS) programme, a component of the physical education strand of the primary-school curriculum.

PAWS teaches children essential water survival techniques so that they have the skills necessary to save themselves in an emergency. It is a cold fact that children today are the potential suicide casualties of tomorrow, the number of whom averages 68 each year. If we take the WHO statistic that for every actual suicide, there are twenty attempts then it follows that many lives will be saved if a person attempting suicide has a change of heart and has learnt the necessary skills to reach land. The impact of "Cold Shock" due to sudden immersion in cold water can result in potential suicide casualties making an attempt to save themselves from drowning. Their

chances of making a safe exit are greatly enhanced when they have basic lifesaving skills, therefore Irish Water Safety calls on parents to check that their local school is running the PAWS programme or to get more information at www.iws.ie. Adults too should enrol in one the range of water safety classes nationwide, also listed on the website. This will, in the longer term, have a positive influence on reducing the number of suicide drownings in Ireland.

Irish Water Safety's prevention initiatives extend beyond the above to include other partnerships:

As part of its work to reach out directly to local communities, Irish Water Safety partnered with The Samaritans to coordinate the placing of contact details for The Samaritans on the housing of Ringbuoys located beside rivers, canals, lakes and other waterways where people have been known to take their own lives. It is hoped that this will encourage potential suicide casualties to seek assistance.

To promote the provision of follow-up care, IWS has also partnered with Console to promote their counselling service which is available following the grief of losing a loved one through suicide.

IWS Volunteers have liaised with the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) as part of an innovative suicide prevention project - Optimising Suicide Prevention Programmes and their Implementation in Limerick (OSPI-Limerick).

Suicide by drowning is a major preventable cause of premature death. Irish Water Safety encourages everyone to take swimming and lifesaving classes now and not leave it until the distant future by which time it may tragically be too late.

Media Enquiries:

Irish Water Safety, The Long Walk, Galway Tel:091-56.44.00
John Leech: 087-6789600 / Roger Sweeney: 087-6789601
Email: info@iws.ie Website: www.iws.ie

