

Irish Water Safety Easter appeal: “Teach children how to stay safe from drowning”

Half a million primary school children have started their Easter Holidays yet many may lack an awareness of how to stay safe when playing near or on water. With a full moon this Weds 27th March, and the associated risks of higher waters and spring tide related stranding, Irish Water Safety is appealing to parents to give vital water safety information to their children and that teachers do so when schools return and help prevent further tragic drownings this coming summer.

Children are naturally curious about water therefore parents should check if their local primary school has yet introduced Irish Water Safety's Primary Aquatics Water Safety "PAWS" programme which is a component of the primary school curriculum that teaches children how to stay safe around water. Much of the programme is easily delivered as it is classroom based yet many primary schools have yet to deliver this training. With some months left before summer, there is still time for teachers and parents to teach essential life skills to keep children safe from drowning.

Forty children aged fourteen and under drowned in the last ten years, sometimes silently and in a matter of seconds and in just a few inches of water, therefore it is essential that kids are constantly supervised when on or near water.

Constant responsible parental supervision guarantees child safety yet tragic drownings occur every year when children manage to escape the watchful eye of guardians. Schoolteachers are ideally placed to instill good safety habits in time for the summer months ahead.

We average 140 drownings in Ireland every year and water-related tragedies can happen in seconds and although 2011 had fewer drownings than average at 128, the dangers that put people's lives at risk have not gone away and a danger foreseen is a danger avoided. Irish Water Safety has the following lifesaving advice that teachers and parents alike can deliver to keep children safe from drowning.

54% of drownings occur inland and 34% occurred in coastal regions therefore walkers should remain alert and stay well away from the edge of ordinarily familiar waterside pathways due to the risk of riverbanks crumbling away or beach walk stranding. Please carry your mobile phone and ideally be in the company of others. Remember your lifeline in an emergency is 999 and 112.

Anglers are at risk and should be extremely vigilant when fishing from the shoreline of Atlantic swells. They and those boating should ensure that their family and friends wear a lifejacket at all times.

Alcohol should be avoided before or during any aquatic activity. On average, a third of drowning victims had consumed alcohol therefore it is best left until after your activity to celebrate.

When children are brought boating, it is essential that they wear a lifejacket and that the lifejacket has a crotch strap to avoid the possibility of the child slipping out through it. More online advice, geared towards children, is available at www.aquaattack.ie to ensure children's safety when boating, on farms, at inland waterways, on holidays, at swimming pools and all areas where tragic drownings have previously occurred.

Irish Water Safety encourages everyone to take swimming, lifesaving, survival and rescue classes and for further information click on www.iws.ie. If you locate missing Ringbuoys then log on to www.ringbuoys.ie to report them as “a stolen ringbuoy could lead to a stolen life” in an emergency.

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