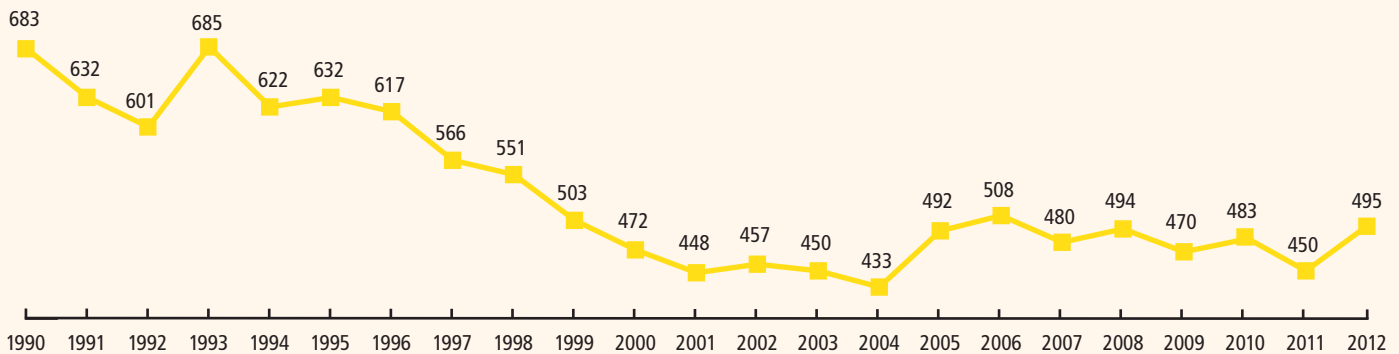


# DROWNING REPORT

Prepared for the Lifesaving Society Canada by the Drowning Prevention Research Centre

## Canadian Totals 1990 - 2012



The upswing in Ontario drownings continues with 178 fatalities in the most recent Coroner’s data (2012). This is the largest number of water-related fatalities in Ontario since 2006. After an encouraging 2011 where the death rate dropped to 1.2 per 100,000 population, 2012 marks a return to a rate of 1.3.

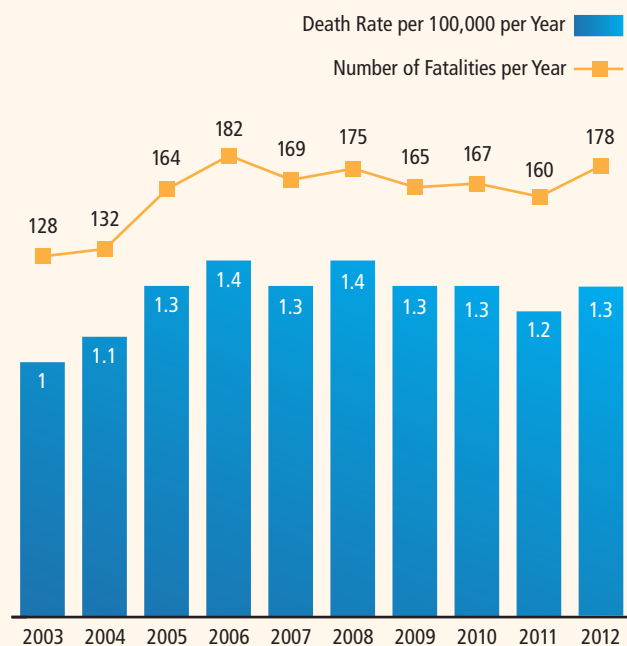
Looking at the most current five years (2008-2012) of data as a whole, the drowning spike in 2012 contributed to an 8% increase in the water-related fatality rate – 1.3 per 100,000 population (versus 1.2 in the previous five year period). A total of 845 drownings occurred in Ontario waters between 2008 and 2012.

The adjacent chart demonstrates the trend towards increasing drowning numbers and rates in Ontario over the past 10 years.

### Preliminary interim data

For drownings since 2012, only preliminary, interim data from media and Internet reports are available. In Ontario, these numbers indicate that at least 113 drownings occurred in 2013 and at least 86 in 2014.

## Ontario Water-Related Fatalities and Death Rates 2003-2012



# WHO is drowning?

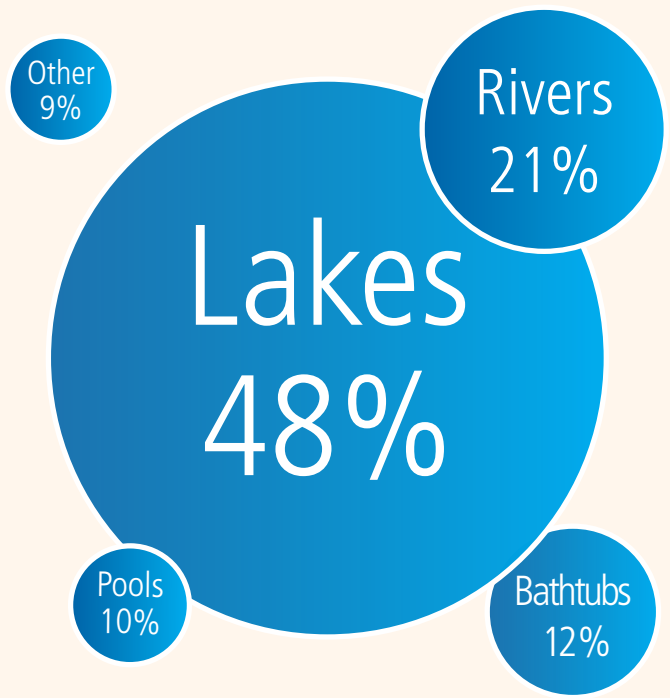
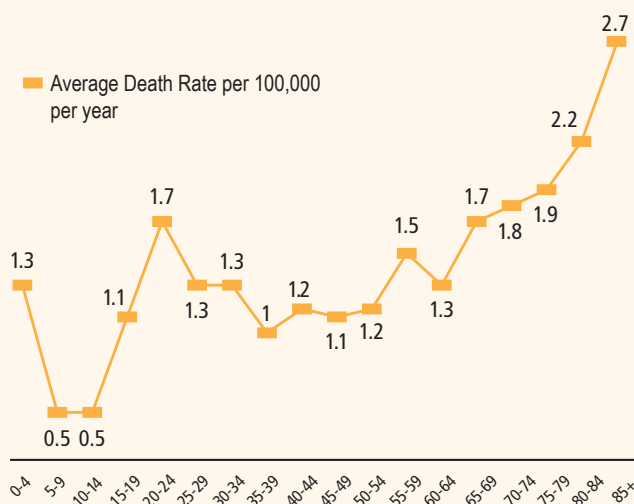


The vast majority of Ontario drowning victims are men (8 out of 10). Between 2008 and 2012, the average water-related fatality rate for men was 2.1 per 100,000 population compared to 0.5 for women. In 2012, there was a slight increase in the number of female drowning victims – 25% were female, the greatest proportion in the last 10 years. The highest drowning rates among females occurred in those over 80 years of age.

By age, the highest drowning rates in Ontario were found among adults over 65. This differs from national trends. In most other provinces, the highest rates were found among young adults. Young adults are also at risk in Ontario: 20-24-year-olds had the next highest death rate after older adults at 1.7 per 100,000 population. Moreover, in 2012 there was a surge in drownings among 25-29-year-olds with 19 fatalities. This contributed to a 2012 water-related fatality rate of 2.1 per 100,000 population, by far the highest rate seen in this age group in the last 5 years.

Despite a long term trend towards decreased drowning death rates among children under 5 years in Canada, rates remain relatively high among this age group in Ontario. Between 2008 and 2012, the average water-related fatality rate for children under 5 was 1.3 per 100,000. In 2012 alone, 10 children under the age of 5 drowned.

## Water-Related Death Rate By Age, 2008-2012



## WHERE are they drowning?

Natural bodies of water continue to account for the largest proportion of drownings in Ontario in the 2008-2012 period (69%). Lakes claimed the greatest number of lives (48%) followed by rivers and streams (21%). In 2012, 89 people drowned in a lake and 35 people drowned in a river or stream.

Bathtubs (12%) continue to be the number one man-made setting where drownings occur in Ontario. And bathtub drownings are on the rise. Between 2008 and 2012, there were 102 bathtub fatalities – almost a 50% increase from the previous five year period. Children under 5 (11%), and seniors over 65 (38%), continue to be the most vulnerable for bathtub drownings.

Private pools, which accounted for 10% of all drownings in Ontario, pose a concern especially for children under 5 for whom private pools were the number one setting for drownings (37%).

Drownings in lifeguard supervised settings continue to be rare: in 2008-2012 only 1% of drownings in Ontario occurred under lifeguard supervision.

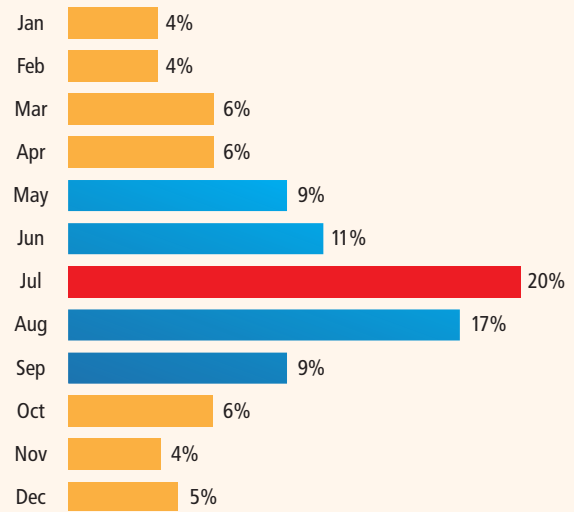
In 2008-2012, drownings more commonly occurred in urban (69%) versus rural (31%) settings. By district, the greatest number of drownings in 2012 occurred in Toronto (14%) followed by Kenora (7%), Simcoe (5%), Ottawa and Niagara (both 4%).

# WHEN are they drowning?

By time of year, the warmer months still account for the majority of drownings in Ontario. Almost two thirds (64%) of water-related fatalities in the 2008-2012 period occurred in May through September. The highest number of drownings occurred in July and August (36%). In 2012, 37 drownings occurred in July alone which accounted for over 20% of the total water-related fatalities in Ontario that year.

Over half (52%) of the 2008-2012 drownings happened on the weekend (Friday, Saturday or Sunday).

## Water-Related Fatalities by Time of Year



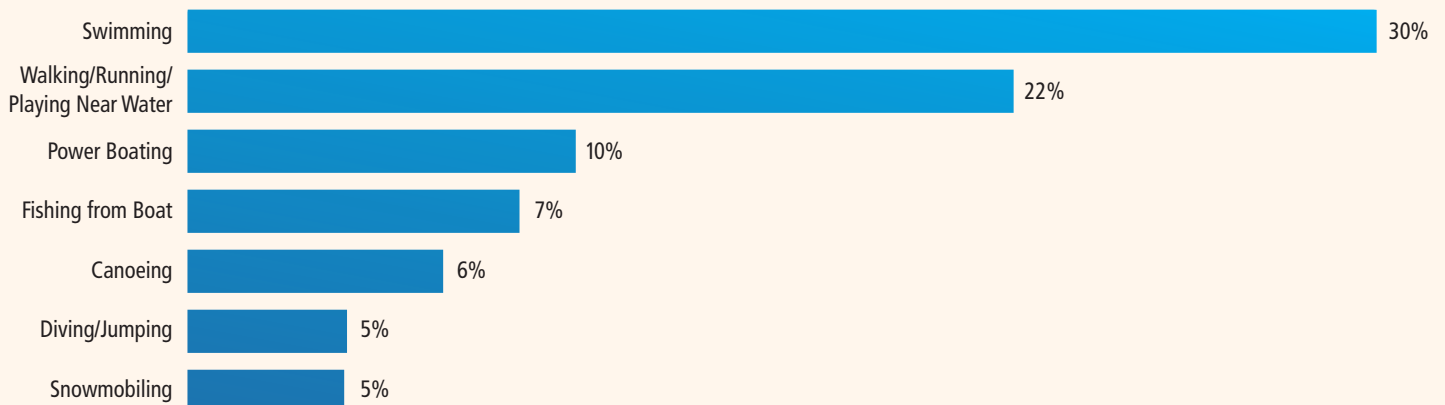
# WHAT were they doing?

By purpose of activity, recreational activities continue to account for the majority of drownings in Ontario. Two thirds (65%) of individuals who drowned between 2008 and 2012 were engaged in a recreational activity at the time. Among these, the most common primary recreational activity was swimming (30%). In 2012, 48 people drowned while swimming, the largest number of drownings to occur from this activity in Ontario in the past five years. This increase may be partially attributable to the very warm summer experienced in Ontario in 2012. Daily living incidents continue to account for a high proportion of

drownings in Ontario (23%). Half of these deaths can be attributed to bathing fatalities, and another quarter to motor vehicle accidents. In 2012, 25 people drowned while bathing, and 11 drowned as the result of a motor vehicle collision.

By type of activity, the greatest proportion of incidents in 2008-2012 occurred during an aquatic activity (29%) where the person intended to be in the water and something went wrong. This was followed by non-aquatic incidents (24%) and boating incidents (21%), the majority of which occurred during powerboat use (63%) or canoeing (22%). Overall, boating deaths were down substantially in 2012. In four of the previous five years, at least 35 people drowned while boating in Ontario. In 2012 this number dropped to 22, or 12% of the total incidents. Only 1 of the 22 people who drowned while boating was wearing a lifejacket.

## Water-Related Fatalities by Most Common Recreational Activity



# Risk factors

The major risk factors contributing to drowning incidents in Ontario continue to be consistent with those the Lifesaving Society has identified for the national population in the past.

## Boating

Not wearing a PFD (87%)  
Capsizing (37%)  
Falling overboard (26%)  
Alcohol consumption (45%)  
Boating alone (32%)

## Swimming

Victim unable to swim (34%)  
Alcohol consumption (35%)  
Swimming alone (30%)  
Heart disease/heart attack (22%)

## Age

### <5

Alone near water (61%)  
Supervision absent or distracted (93%)

### 5-14

With other minors only (35%)

### 15-19

Alcohol consumption (34%)  
Alone (38%)  
After dark (28%)  
Not wearing a PFD when relevant (94%)

### 20-34

Alcohol consumption (54%)  
Alone (33%)  
After dark (30%)  
Not wearing a PFD when relevant (88%)

### 35-64

Alcohol consumption (44%)  
Alone (61%)  
Not wearing a PFD when relevant (72%)

### 65+

Alone (77%)  
Not wearing a PFD when relevant (84%)

# In summary

The water-related fatality rate in Ontario increased in 2012. The highest rates occur among men and older adults.

Drownings are most likely to occur during the summer, on weekends, and in natural bodies of water such as lakes and rivers.

The highest proportion of incidents occurs during a recreational activity, most commonly swimming. Fewer boating fatalities occurred in 2012.

The upswing in the number of drownings in Ontario in 2012 reinforces the need for continued strong drowning prevention efforts.

## Research methodology

### Complete data from 2008-2012

The drowning research process involves data collection, research tabulation, and analysis. Water-related death data is extracted from the office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario. The scope of this research:

- collects the data needed to profile victims of aquatic incidents, including the circumstances and contributing factors under which these incidents occurred.
- includes all deaths in Ontario resulting from incidents "in, on or near" water; "near-water" incidents were included if the incident was closely related to water-based recreational, vocational or daily living activity, or if the presence of water appeared to be an attraction contributing to the incident.
- includes only preventable (unintentional) deaths, not deaths due to natural causes, suicide, or homicide.

### Interim data

Complete final data on more recent drownings and other water-related deaths are not yet available from the Office of the Chief Coroner. The interim, preliminary data are derived from media releases, media clippings, news reports and Internet searches.

## Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the support, co-operation and efforts of:

- The Office of the Chief Coroner in Ontario which permitted and facilitated confidential access to coroners' reports on preventable water-related deaths.
- The volunteers who contributed their time and energy including data extraction on preventable water-related deaths from coroners' files.
- Tessa Clemens who was primary author and data analyst for this report and Lucie Simoes who provided data input and verification.

## Contact us

Lifesaving Society Ontario  
Tel: 416-490-8844  
Email: [experts@lifeguarding.com](mailto:experts@lifeguarding.com)  
[www.lifesavingsociety.com](http://www.lifesavingsociety.com)

## Drowning Prevention Research Centre Canada

The Drowning Prevention Research Centre is the lead agency for drowning and water-incident research in Canada. The Centre conducts research into fatal and non-fatal drowning, significant aquatic injury and rescue interventions.

Contact Barbara Byers, Research Director,  
Email: [experts@drowningresearch.ca](mailto:experts@drowningresearch.ca),  
Telephone: 416-490-8844.

## The Lifesaving Society

The Lifesaving Society – Canada's lifeguarding experts – works to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, Water Smart® public education, aquatic safety management, drowning research and lifesaving sport. Annually, over 1,000,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard and leadership training programs. The Society sets the standard for aquatic safety in Canada and certifies Canada's National Lifeguards.

