

MEDIA RELEASE

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Top Energy WaterSafe Programme continues to save lives

Since the mid-eighties, drowning statistics on average have shown a declining trend in New Zealand. However in January/February 2011 an alarming 46% spike in drowning deaths has seen the national toll rise to 35, compared to 24 for the same period last year.

Says Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) General Manager, Matt Claridge, “We know that drowning incidents peak over the summer months as people take advantage of time away from work and the warmer weather to enjoy aquatic-based activities, but to have such a dramatic increase in terms of a comparison with last year’s statistics is very discouraging.”

Despite 6 of these drownings occurring in the Northland region, the Top Energy Watersafe Programme, which teaches Far North junior school children how to swim and stay safe around water, continues to have a beneficial effect on the region’s drowning statistics, according to Claridge.

Tellingly, a breakdown by age of the 6 Northland fatalities shows:

| AGE GROUP | DROWNINGS* |
|---------------|------------|
| Pre-schoolers | 2 |
| 25 - 34 | 1 |
| 45 - 54 | 1 |
| 55 – 64 | 1 |
| 65 + | 1 |
| All ages | 6 |

* In Northland to 23/03 for 2011.

Says, Claridge, “What we can conclude is that kids who have been targeted by the Top Energy WaterSafe Programme since 1997 are not showing up as drowning statistics. Over the years, the programme has been very successful in passing on basic water survival skills for what hopefully will be a whole generation of people in the Far North”.

Sport Northland, which administers WaterSafe, says the programme has been so successful in the Far North that it is now rolling it out to the rest of Northland, as Swim for Life. WSNZ is funding this new programme.

According to Top Energy CEO, Russell Shaw, WaterSafe is a major commitment in keeping the Far North's young children safe. "Rivers, beaches and tidal areas are where most people continue to drown and we have an abundance of all three. So, in the absence of any substantial government funding or commitment to help with water safety life skills, Top Energy has sponsored the programme for the last 14 years. Over this time more than 100,000 lesson contacts have been made, so we believe the programme is making a real difference", he said.

According to WSNZ, during February alone, 'accidental immersions' accounted for three deaths nationally. Sadly, all three were pre-schoolers who had access to water whilst unsupervised. Said Claridge, "While we feel for the families involved, there is really no excuse for these incidents. Parents and caregivers must ensure that younger children are appropriately supervised at all times when recreating in, or near water. In addition, they must provide a safe home environment and ensure that all potential water hazards are nullified, or unsupervised access is not possible". END.

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TOP ENERGY WATERSAFE PROGRAMME in Summary:

The Top Energy WaterSafe Programme teaches junior school children graduated learn-to-swim and personal survival skills and is designed to allow them to enter and advance through progressive swimming levels at their own pace. Top Energy's sponsorship also enables its Instructors to train teachers and parent helpers as Instructors in participating schools.

There are five separate components to the programme, which are:

- 1) Learn to swim & water survival instruction in school pools, using a nationally recognised 5-level sequential learning programme. Teachers have the opportunity to observe Instructors teaching swimming skills to various ability groups within their class.
- 2) A 6-hour Instructors training course for teachers, which includes practical pool sessions, principles of water safety and risk management, progressive methods of teaching strokes, effective skill teaching methods and swimming lesson planning. In addition, there is a 20-hour practical teaching requirement.
- 3) Assistance in planning and effective aquatic programme in school and/or teaching in-service.
- 4) Day at the beach, to learn how to be Beach Safe – learning about rips, currents, waves, SunSmart and then some fun activities on the beach.
- 5) A Non-swimmers 10-lesson programme which specifically targets those older primary school kids that have been identified by their schools as being unable to swim.