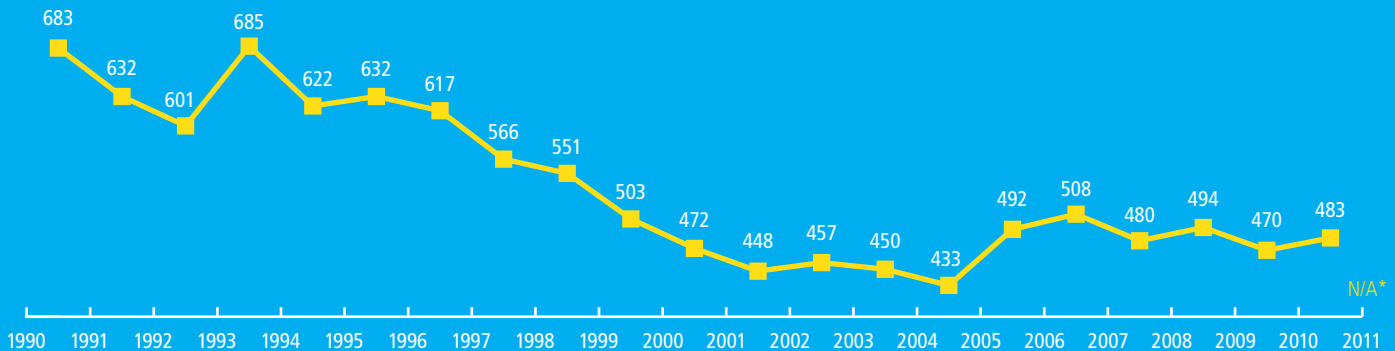


# DROWNING REPORT

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

## Canadian Totals 1990 - 2011



\*National total unknown due to unavailability of 2011 Alberta data.

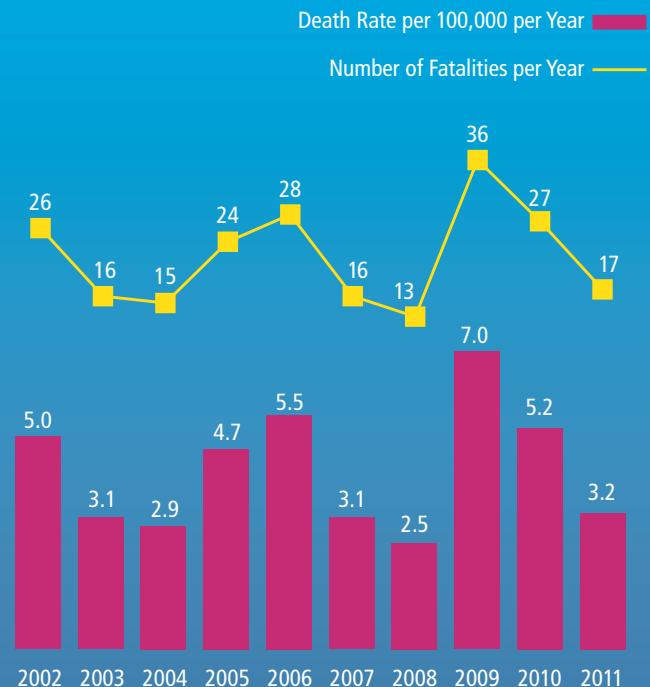
Between 2007 and 2011, 109 drownings occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador waters. In these most recent Coroner's data collection years, the average drowning rate in Newfoundland and Labrador has remained the same as in the previous five year period. The average water-related fatality rate for 2007-2011 was 4.2 per 100,000 population. The greatest number of drownings (36) occurred in 2009, however the number of fatalities in this year was unusually high due to a single incident. A helicopter went down over the Atlantic east of St. John's, Newfoundland in March 2009 and 17 of the 18 occupants suffered a water-related fatality.

When compared to historic national averages, the drowning rate in Newfoundland and Labrador (4.2 per 100,000) is substantially higher than that of Canada as a whole (1.5 per 100,000).

### Preliminary interim data

For drownings since 2011, only preliminary, interim data from media and internet reports are available. In Newfoundland and Labrador these numbers indicate that at least 11 drownings occurred in 2012 and at least 11 occurred in 2013.

## Newfoundland and Labrador Water-Related Fatalities and Death Rates 2002-2011

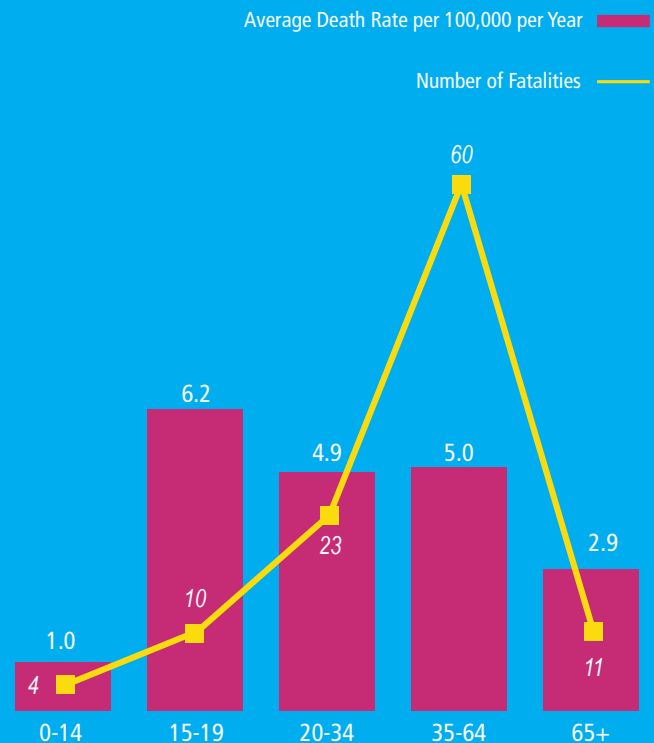


# WHO is drowning?

The vast majority of Newfoundland and Labrador drowning victims are men, mirroring the trends in national statistics. In the 2007-2011 period, the average yearly water-related fatality rate for men in Newfoundland and Labrador was 8.0 per 100,000 population compared to a rate of 0.5 for women. Typically, 8 out of 10 drowning victims in Canada are male. In Newfoundland and Labrador, it is 9 out of 10.

By age, the highest drowning rates in Newfoundland and Labrador were found among teenagers 15-19 years old. Rates were also high among young adults 20-34 and middle aged adults 35-64. Lower death rates were evident among children and older adults in Newfoundland and Labrador. Few water-related fatalities occurred among individuals under the age of 15 and over the age of 65.

## Death Rate 2007-2011 by Age



Death rates should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size

21%

lakes

6%

other

9%

rivers

64%

ocean

# WHERE are they drowning?

The vast majority (94%) of water-related fatalities in Newfoundland and Labrador occurred in natural bodies of water. Almost two thirds (64%) of drownings in 2007-2011 occurred in the ocean. The next highest proportion occurred in lakes (21%) followed by flowing water such as rivers and streams (9%). Very few water-related fatalities took place in man-made settings such as bathtubs, pools, ditches and culverts.

None of the 109 drownings in Newfoundland and Labrador between 2007 and 2011 occurred in a lifeguard supervised setting.

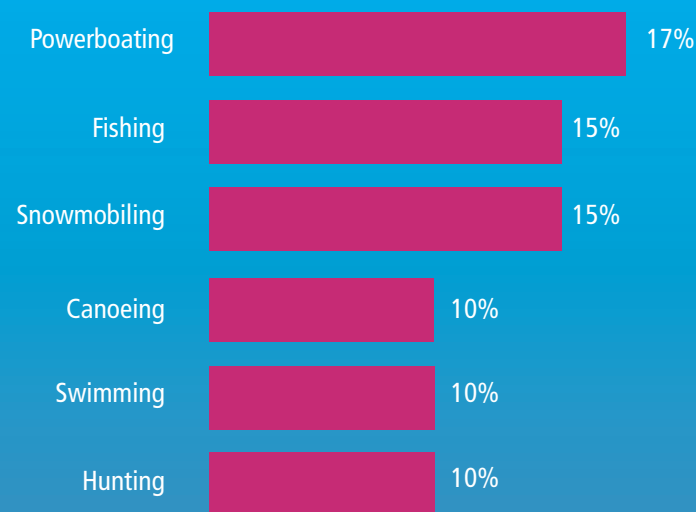
The majority (63%) of Newfoundland and Labrador drownings took place in rural settings. This proportion differs from some of the other provinces where the majority of drownings occur in urban environments. Approximately 41% of the Newfoundland and Labrador population lives in rural settings.

# WHEN are they drowning?

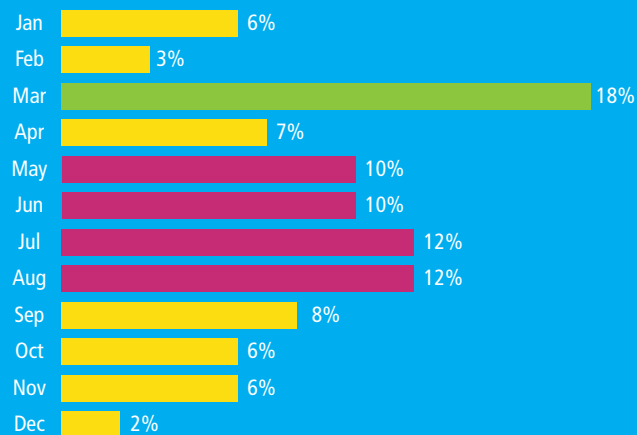
A large proportion of drownings in Newfoundland and Labrador occurred during the warmer months with almost half (44%) of water-related fatalities between 2007 and 2011 occurring in May through August. In this most recent period, March had an unusually high number of drownings (18%), however the vast majority (85%) of these fatalities can be attributed to the helicopter incident in 2009.

Excluding the helicopter incident, over half (55%) of Newfoundland and Labrador drownings occurred on weekend days (Friday, Saturday or Sunday), with the greatest proportion (33%) occurring on Saturday.

## Victims by Most Common Recreational Activity



## Victims by Time of Year



# WHAT were they doing?

Almost half (48%) of victims who drowned in Newfoundland and Labrador between 2007 and 2011 were engaged in a recreational activity at the time of the incident. Among these, the most common primary recreational activities were powerboating (17%), fishing (15%), and snowmobiling (15%).

The proportion of occupational incidents (31%) in Newfoundland and Labrador is substantially higher than the historic national average (6%). The most common occupational activity in Newfoundland and Labrador was fishing (32%).

Daily living activities accounted for the next highest proportion of incidents in Newfoundland and Labrador (18%). The most common daily living activities were travel by foot (50%) and motor vehicle travel (30%).

By type of activity, the greatest proportion of incidents occurred while boating (40%). Almost two thirds (64%) of these incidents involved a powerboat. Only 16% of the victims of a boating-related fatality were wearing a lifejacket at the time of the incident and almost one third (29%) of these victims were wearing the lifejacket improperly.

## Risk Factors

The major risk factors contributing to drowning incidents in Newfoundland and Labrador are consistent with those the Lifesaving Society has identified for the national population in the past.

### Boating

Not wearing a PFD (75%)  
Alcohol consumption (20%)  
Capsized (45%)  
Rough water (20%)  
Boating in twilight or darkness (23%)

### Age

#### 15-19

Alcohol consumption (40%)  
After dark (50%)  
Not wearing PFD when relevant (100%)

#### 20-34

Alcohol consumption (48%)  
After dark (35%)  
Alone (35%)  
Not wearing PFD when relevant (89%)

#### 35-64

Alcohol consumption (23%)  
Twilight or after dark (20%)  
Alone (35%)  
Not wearing PFD when relevant (75%)

#### 65+

Alcohol consumption (30%)  
Alone (50%)  
Not wearing PFD when relevant (100%)

## In Summary

Water-related fatality rates in Newfoundland and Labrador are highest among men, and teenagers 15 to 19 years old.

Drownings are most likely to occur on weekends during the warmer months in natural bodies of water such as the ocean.

The highest proportion of incidents occur during a recreational activity, most commonly powerboating, fishing or snowmobiling. Occupational accidents contribute to a high proportion of drownings in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The water-related fatality rate in Newfoundland and Labrador remains substantially higher than historic national averages. This reinforces the need for continued strong drowning prevention efforts.

## Research methodology

### Complete data from 2007-2011

The drowning research process involves data collection; research tabulation and analysis. Water-related death data is extracted from the offices of Canada's Chief Coroners and Medical Examiners. 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 each provincial/territorial jurisdiction 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 offices of the provincial/territorial Chief Coroners and Medical Examiners. 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 Medical Examiner of Newfoundland and Labrador which permitted and facilitated confidential access to 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

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### 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.

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### 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.



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