

Open Water Drowning Prevention Policy Strategy: Surveillance – Drowning Reporting Tool

BACKGROUND

We can learn from each fatal and nonfatal drowning how to prevent future tragedies. Investigation of open water drownings requires collecting data specific to open water sites and prevention considerations. An online tool could be an efficient and effective way of data collection, data sharing, and identifying prevention opportunities among the multiple agencies involved with investigating these drownings.

STRATEGIES/OBJECTIVES

Develop a comprehensive drowning reporting tool and database to track and collect data on all fatal and nonfatal drowning incidents in open water

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Developed and piloted an [Open Water Drowning Reporting Tool \(PDF\)](#) to collect all fatal and nonfatal drowning event information, which was not previously available in Washington State. Texas is the only state we are aware of with a drowning registry.

The team worked to:

- Identify how drowning investigations are currently being conducted.
- Identify what data is collected.
- Develop a comprehensive list of Washington State data collection tools and databases on drowning events.
- Identify what data each stakeholder (police/marine patrol, EMS, coroner/medical examiner, child death review team, boating agency/U.S. Coast Guard, injury/drowning prevention, public health) needs.
- Develop data questions to help identify the presence or absence of prevention factors in each incident that point to prevention opportunities.

The team compared and analyzed information on drownings from various local, state and national databases and news reports. This review indicated that data collection is duplicated by many organizations/agencies and not shared. When data needs to be shared with other organizations, the process is unnecessarily difficult and lengthy.

The drowning reporting tool created contains the multiple domains of data requested by stakeholders and in 2013, sheriff marine patrol, medical examiners and coroners piloted the open water drowning reporting tool in Washington State. They found the tool easy to use and were willing to use it. The tool can be used after any drowning event in open water that results in medical care or death.

DISSEMINATION

The following organizations and agencies received the drowning reporting tool. The organizations that reviewed and commented on the tool during its development are marked with an asterisk (*).

Regional

- Alaska Office of Boating Safety
- Inland Drowning Prevention Network
- Medical examiners and coroners in King*, Snohomish*, Spokane*, Kitsap*, Lewis*, Chelan* and Grays Harbor* counties
- Public Health — Seattle & King County* and various other health districts in Washington, including Snohomish, Spokane, Benton-Franklin, Pierce and Chelan-Douglas counties
- Safe Kids Washington
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington State Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners*
- Washington State Department of Health*
- Washington State Drowning Prevention Network*
- Washington State Parks Boating Agency*
- Marine Patrol in King*, Clark*, Spokane and Snohomish* counties as well as Mercer Island*
- Washington State Parks and Recreation Boating Program*

National

- American Red Cross' Aquatic Subcouncil of the Scientific Advisory Council*
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Boy Scouts of America*
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention*
- Centers for Disease Control National Center for Environmental Health
- Centers for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics
- Centers for Disease Control Public Health Law Program
- National Association of Medical Examiners
- National Association of State Boating Law Administrators
- National Child Death Review*
- National Park Service
- National Swimming Pool Foundation*

DISSEMINATION CONTINUED – National Distribution

- Safe Kids Worldwide
- United States Coast Guard
- United States Lifesaving Association*
- USA Swimming*
- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
- Water Safety USA*
- YMCA

International

- International Life Saving Federation
- Australian Life Saving Federation*
- New Zealand Life Saving Federation*
- Swiss Life Saving Federation

IMPACT

- Several counties and cities are routinely using the tool for internal purposes.
- The Washington State Parks and Recreation Boating Program hopes to use the tool to gather information on boating-related drownings, incorporating many of its data questions into the Washington State Patrol's Statewide Electronic Collision & Ticket Online Records (SECTOR).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Environmental Health and the National Center for Health Statistics are working to incorporate the tool into its disaster-related drowning investigation form.

CHALLENGES/LIMITATIONS

- Alcohol and drug use data was limited due to confidentiality concerns.
- The form was used by some coroners. Medical examiners were concerned about confidentiality and perceived lack of need since they have death investigators.
- Ownership and support for a drowning surveillance program at the state level with the Washington State Department of Health, emergency medical service organizations, water recreation organizations or other organizations/agencies did not move forward due to a lack of funding.

NEXT STEPS

Recommend developing and resourcing an online system at the state level that promotes the efficient use of data collection and sharing for injury and death that includes open water drownings.

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