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EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



Royal Life Saving

ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY - AUSTRALIA

FACT SHEET No.13

# Inland Waterways



## Q. Why do drowning deaths occur in inland waterways?

A. There are many reasons. The flat, still surface of an inland waterway can give a false sense of security. Currents, even in seemingly tranquil waterways, can prove dangerous. Inland waterways are not patrolled by lifeguards, and should someone get into trouble, there may be no one there to assist. Swimmers can also get panicked if they get caught on submerged objects, which are present in many of these waterways.

## Q. Where do drowning deaths in inland waterways occur?

A. In inland waterways there are many environments where drowning deaths have occurred – rivers, lakes, dams, irrigation channels, water tanks and creeks have all been sites of drowning deaths.

## Q. What safety precautions can I take if I want to swim in an inland waterway?

A. Remember that water conditions which may have been suitable previously can change hourly with the current. Submerged objects, like branches or rocks, are often invisible from above the surface and present a real risk of neck and spinal injuries, especially to divers. Always enter the water slowly, feet first – never dive in. Be aware also that cold water can cause hypothermia. Water can be deeper than you think due to steep drop-offs in dams or riverbeds.

## Q. Who is drowning in inland waterways?

A. All types and ages of people are drowning in inland waterways, from young children to the elderly. In 2009/10 there were 59 drowning deaths in rivers, creeks and streams, with 3 of these being children under the age of 5. There were also 42 people who drowned in a lake, dam or lagoon of which 4 were children under the age of 5.

## Q. Why are inland waterways dangerous?

A. Changing seasonal patterns, flooding and other effects of nature can cause inland waterways to change. Remember if the waterway is flooded don't try to cross it. While it may look calm and shallow on the surface it is possible that the road that was there no longer exists.

## Real Life Story - School Camp Drowning

A young boy has drowned in a dam on school camp. The boy was swimming in a dam with friends when he lost his footing and fell into a steep drop off. The child could not make it back to the edge and drowned. The murky water of the dam hampered rescue efforts as it was extremely difficult to locate his body.

ROYAL LIFE SAVING HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF FACT SHEETS ON WATER SAFETY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA.

Contact Royal Life Saving on: **1300 737 763**  
or download them from: **www.keepwatch.com.au**

## Inland Waterways Safety Checklist:

- Checked conditions before entering
- Entered water slowly, feet first
- Care taken around crumbling riverbeds and slippery dam edges
- Underwater obstacles such as rocks, branches and rubbish avoided
- Care taken when walking on unstable, uneven and slippery riverbeds
- Avoided crossing flooded inland waterways

ALWAYS KEEP WATCH  
AROUND NATURAL  
WATER ENVIRONMENTS  
TO PREVENT DROWNING

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