

Almost half of Washington drownings happen in rivers and streams

Local News

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Posted on : July 24, 2013 at 6:20 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - Enjoying Washington's waters can be one of the highlights of the summer, yet it can also be dangerous, as recent drowning cases have shown. Analysis by state health officials of recent reported drowning deaths show most in our state happen in summer months, and almost half of the 100 deaths a year occur in rivers and streams. Frigid temperatures caused by icy mountain runoff are among the reasons these types of waters are so dangerous. Cold water can affect even strong swimmers' muscles and nervous system within 10 minutes, overriding strength and endurance. Watching out for treacherous conditions and using common safety strategies can avoid tragedy. Fast moving currents can also be treacherous, and logs, branches, and bushes can snag or tip rafts and inner tubes and hold a person under water. In addition to life vests, people in swift creeks or rivers should be wary of where they put their feet. A foot jammed between rocks in a creek with a strong current can push a person underwater.

The highest drowning numbers are among teenage and young adult males. An inexperienced swimmer might intend to cool off by wading, but may step off an unseen ledge and quickly be in over their head. Children should be watched at all times when they're in or near water, and non-swimmers should always be within arm's reach. Call for help if you see someone in trouble. Then find something to reach out to them with or throw them a lifeline. If you decide to go in the water to help, bring something with you to help keep you both afloat. People who drown often do so silently and without notice. The best defense against the risks that can happen around water is a well-fitting life jacket. Taking the proper precautions is the best way to ensure that a fun summer outing doesn't turn into a tragedy.