

STUDY CITES DECLINING U.S. DROWNING RATE

The rate of drowning in the U.S. is declining but the reasons are unclear. In the U.S. in 1995, there were 4,350 deaths due to unintentional drowning, making it the fourth most common cause of accidental death in this country.

Peter Cummings, M.D. and Linda Quan, M.D., of the University of Washington looked at King County, Washington drowning statistics in hope of finding reasons for the decline. The number of drowning deaths in King County has declined in the last two decades. This, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), mirrors a national trend.

Cummings and Quan studied drowning incidents in King County over 21 years from January 1, 1975 to December 31, 1995. During the years covered by the study, they noted 539 deaths by drowning. An additional 284 people were successfully treated after submersion and did not die.

During the study period, drowning decreased by 65% in King County. By 1995, approximately 28 fewer deaths occurred than would have been expected had the death rate remained unchanged from 1975. The incidence of death at the scene of the submersion, even without any medical care, decreased by 77%. This subgroup accounted for 91% of the prevented deaths in 1995. This provides convincing evidence that medical care played no role in the downward trend in drownings.

TYPE OF DROWNING	% DECREASE 1975-1995
Boating-related drowning	75%
Swimming-related drowning	66%
Swimming pool drowning	48%
Bath tub drowning	9%

The authors of the study believe that improvements in safety are responsible for the decrease in drownings. Ordinances have been passed to improve gates and fences around pools. Pool inspections have been expanded as have life guard presence and training. The use of life jackets among boaters aged 15 years and older has increased. The decrease in death attributable to alcohol use by people 15 years or older went down 81% during the study period.

The editors of JAMA feel the study provides convincing evidence that the decrease of alcohol use in and on the water, may be responsible in part for declining drowning rates. However, the results may be hard to corroborate.



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