Summer Heat Wave Leads to Drowning, Water Safety Reminders

by K_Guice

With temperature soaring upwards of 100 degrees in some parts of Oregon in the past few weeks, many people headed to local waters to cool off. Several of those summer outings ended in tragedy and now serve as a solemn safety reminder to all Oregonians planning aquatic activities.

Two young men, reported to be 20 and 21 years old visiting from out of town, lost their lives in the Clackamas River, near Carver on July 2.

The Clackamas County Sheriff's Office reports the first victim was found at approximately 7 p.m. and transported to Providence Milwaukie Hospital. Efforts to revive the young man failed.

The second man was found about an hour later. â€œThese two victims were not wearing personal flotation devices at the time of this incident,â€• according to a sheriffâ€™s office press release.

Monday, June 26, the body of a 12-year-old girl was recovered from Roslyn Lake just east of Portland. Clara Elias Ascencio and three other girls were swimming Sunday afternoon about 100 yards from the shore when they began struggling.

A nearby boater was able to help three of the girls, but was unable to reach Ascencio. Tom Wells, marine deputy with the Deschutes County Sheriffâ€™s Office said this is the time of year parents have to stay alert.

â€œUsing a little common sense and taking a few safety precautions can make the difference between a fun family outing and tragedy.â€• - Tom Wells, Deschutes County Sheriffâ€™s Officeâ€œParents get distracted and it seems like that is when something happens,â€• he said. â€œBiggest thing is, if your kids are going to be in a river or lake we recommend they wear life jackets.â€•

However, he admits with teenagers it can be hard. â€œLook at the river down by the Old Mill District and look at the number of kids with no supervision,â€• Wells said. While older kids and teens may be responsible and good swimmers, he says there are other elements to keep in mind.

â€œThey might be great swimmers in the pool, but in lakes, rivers and the ocean youâ€™ve got currents to deal with, youâ€™ve got cold water,â€• he said. â€œJumping into the water, there is a shock factor to consider.â€•

The crews searching for Ascencio found her in 12 feet of water. The Clackamas County Sheriff's Office reported that the water was 63 degrees, a chilly contrast to a heat wave that pushed temperatures into triple digits in many parts of the state.

The 12-year-old girl was one of several people to drown in recent weeks. Marion County authorities recently identified John Steven Rae, 59, of Crabtree as another victim. He drowned in the Little North Santiam River after helping three female â€“ ages 9, 15 and 20 â€“ to safety and then succumbed to the waters himself.

At Salem's Walter Wirth Lake, the body of Maria Martinez was recovered. The 13-year-old girl was enjoying an outing with her family.

At Sandy River, Edward Wyatt Jr., 40, of Gresham died after diving from a cliff. Geoffrey Reynolds, 29, of Portland drowned in the Clackamas River while rafting with friends.

Wells says the waters can be dangerous and when things go wrong they have teams in place that are specially trained ready to help. For example, he said the swift water rescue team works in tandem with the mountain rescue team, who are the rope experts.

â€œWe come in, set up a rope system and raft and do whatever it takes to get to the victim,â€• he said. Search and rescue activities are a mandated function of the sheriff's office. Their mission is to provide search and rescue assistance to the citizens of Deschutes County, visitors to the county and mutual aid to other counties as requested.

Ultimately, Wells says they donâ€™t want to have to be called out at all. He says people have to be smart, especially during the warmer weather. Wells also warns that people need to be aware of the alcohol factor. â€œWhen itâ€™s hot like this alcohol affects you quicker,â€• he said.

â€œYou get brave and you do some things you wouldnâ€™t normally do,â€• Wells added. â€œAn example of that is the drowning last summer at the Old Mill District. There was some alcohol involved.â€•

Wells also reminds people that safety out of the water and on the boat is just as important. It important that people do simple things like stay hydrated and wear a safety jacket. â€œItâ€™s crucial that any child under the age 13 must have a life jacket on anytime they are in a boat,â€• he said.

Using a little common sense and taking a few safety precautions can make the difference between a fun family outing and tragedy.

Drowning Prevention Safety Tips Children and teens should have constant adult supervision when in or near the water. Never swim alone and teach children to always have a swim buddy. Learn to swim. Swim classes are recommended for children who are four and older. Learn CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). Knowing what to do during an emergency can be a matter of life and death. Donâ€™t use air-filled swimming aids like water wings in place of life jackets or life preservers with children. According to WebMD, these can give parents and children a false sense of security and increase the risk of drowning. Check the water depth before entering. The American Red Cross recommends nine feet as a minimum depth for diving or jumping. Never drink alcohol before or while swimming, boating, or water skiing and teach teens about the danger of drinking alcohol and water activities. Use common sense and take safety precautions.

Summer Heat Wave Leads to Drowning, Water Safety Reminders by K_Guice