

The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2026

Annex 1: UK Data Tables





The following data are taken from the updated dataset used in the WAID Enhancement Project. This is v2 of the published 2019 to 2023 data and is the most up-to-date and accurate dataset.

Overall water-related fatalities

There were 3,178 water-related fatalities in the UK between 2019 and 2023. Accidental outcomes accounted for 44 per cent of these (n=1409).

The average number of overall water-related fatalities was 636 per year, of which 107 fatalities were inconclusive outcomes which may be later classified as suicide, crime or accidental.

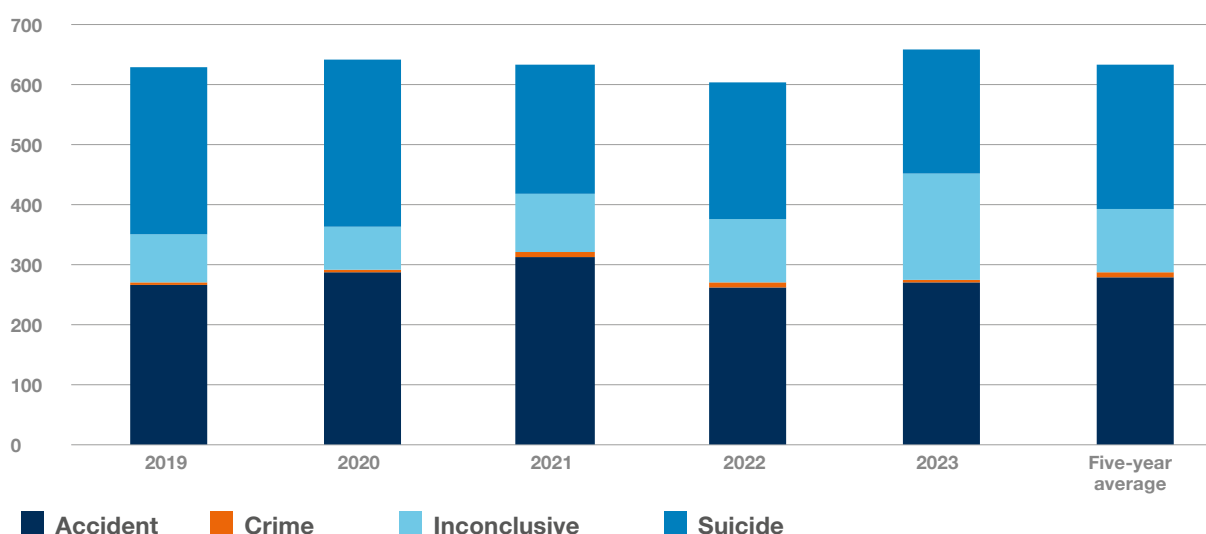


Figure 1: Overall water-related fatalities by outcome, year and five-year average

Accidental fatalities

There were 1,409 accidental water-related fatalities in the UK between 2019 and 2023.

The average number of accidental water-related fatalities was 282 per year (see Figure 2).

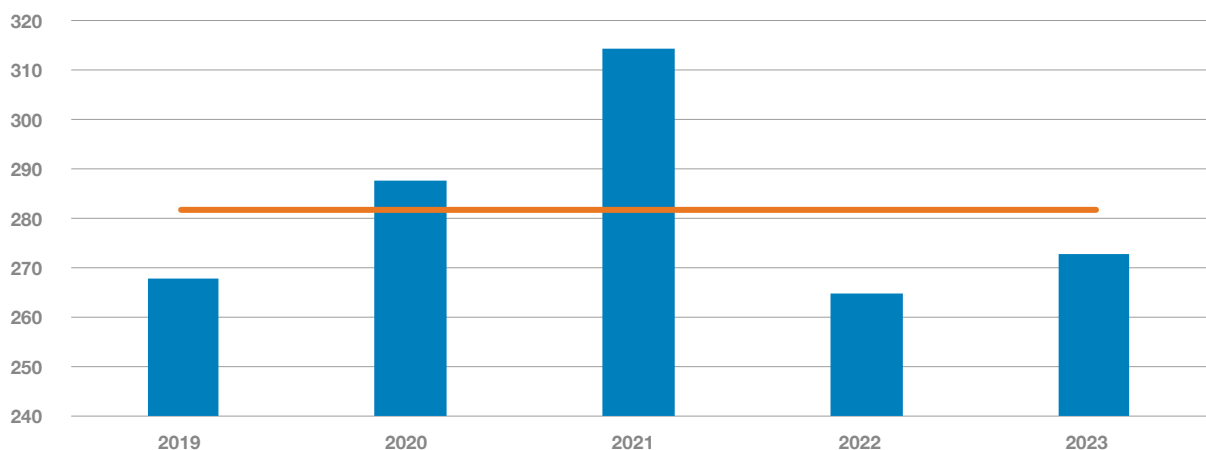


Figure 2: UK accidental water-related fatalities by year and five-year average



In terms of the rate per population, the average accidental water-related fatality rate per 100,000 people was 0.42.

Five-year average estimated population	67,301,536
Accidental fatalities	282
Overall rate per 100,000 people	0.42

Table 1: Accidental water-related fatality rate per 100,000 people

When looking across the UK nations, England accounted for most accidental water-related fatalities over the five-year period (2019 to 2023) with 68 per cent (see Figure 3). However, when taking account of the population, England has the lowest accidental water-related fatality rate in the UK at 0.37 per 100,000 people (see Figure 4). Over the five-year period, Scotland had the highest rate of accidental water-related fatalities at 0.93 per 100,000 followed by Wales at 0.91 per 100,000 and Northern Ireland at 0.57 per 100,000. It should however be noted that more complete data for Scotland is available from the Drowning and Incident (DIR) process which has shown a decrease in accidental water-related fatalities in the past few years. Using both WAID and DIR data, the average accidental water-related fatality rate for Scotland was 0.86 (over 2019 to 2025).

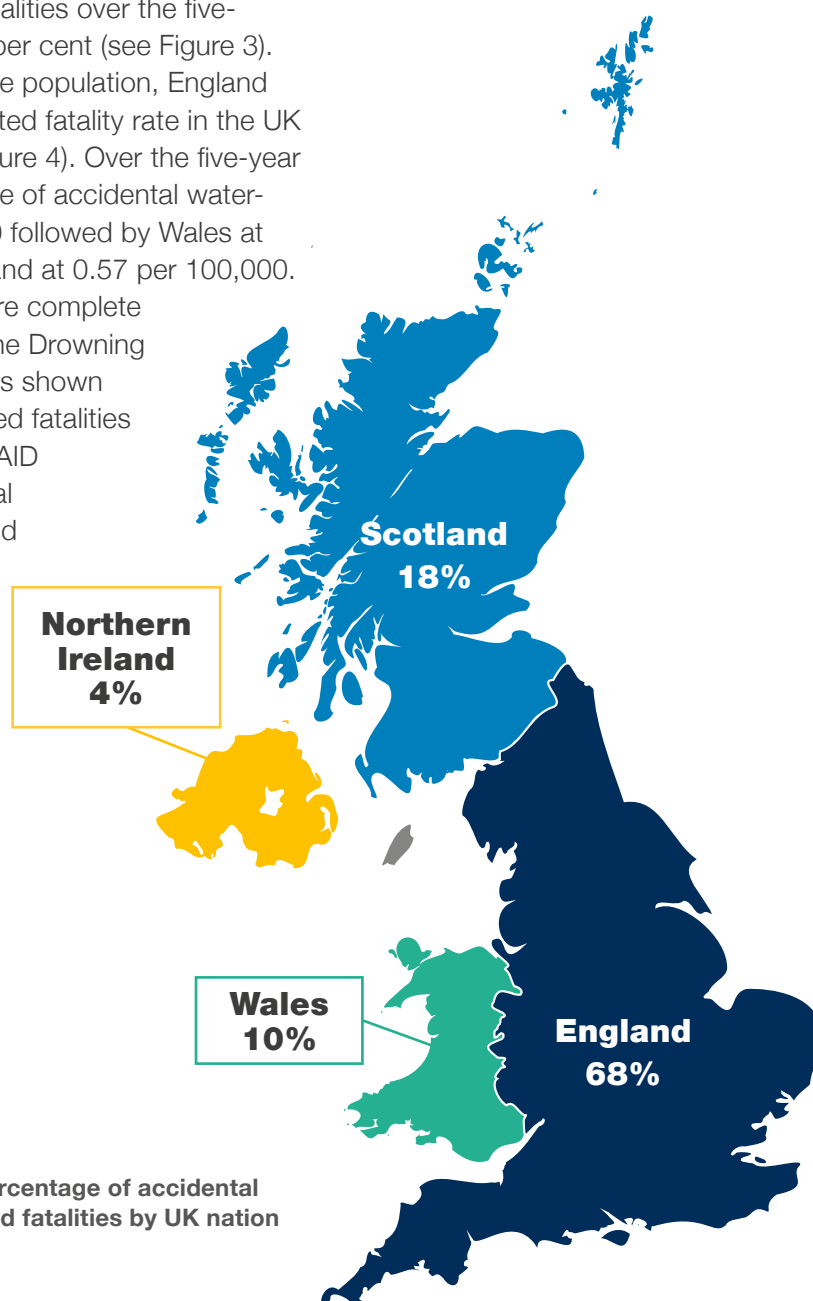


Figure 3: Percentage of accidental water-related fatalities by UK nation

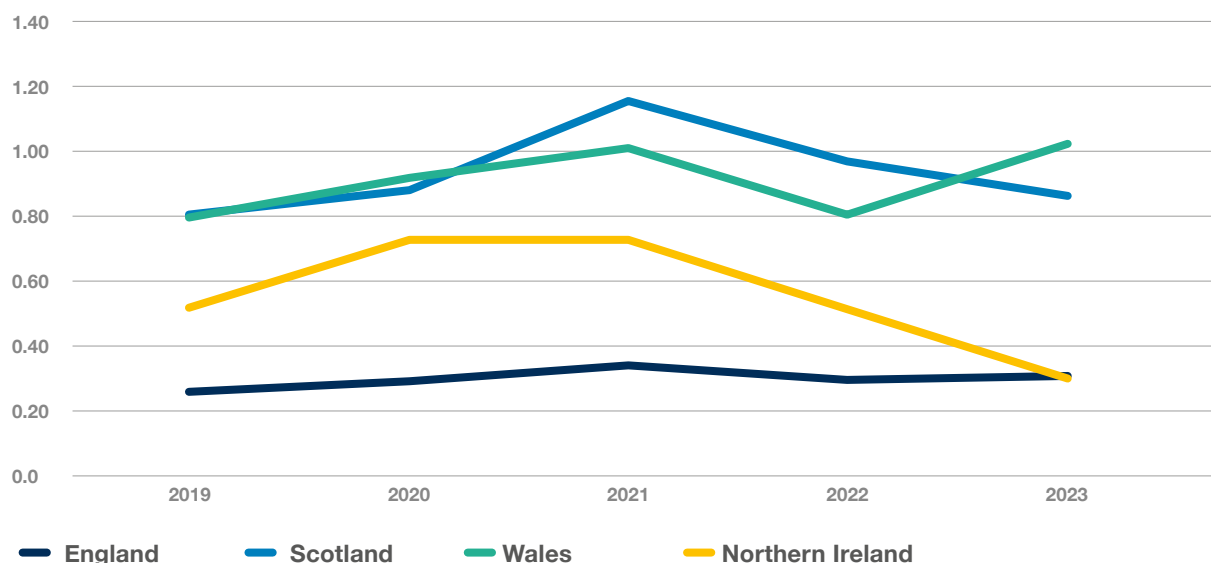


Figure 4: UK nations accidental water-related fatality rate per 100,000 by year

Accidental water-related fatality data by demographics

Accidental drownings reflect normal everyday activities and happen throughout every stage of life. In every age group however, males are the most at-risk group, accounting for eight in ten of all accidental water-related fatality deaths (see Figure 5).

Accidental fatalities rise from late teens with a distinct peak in male drowning in the 20 to 29 year old age group. Among females, those aged 20 to 29 and 50 to 59 are the most frequent casualties.

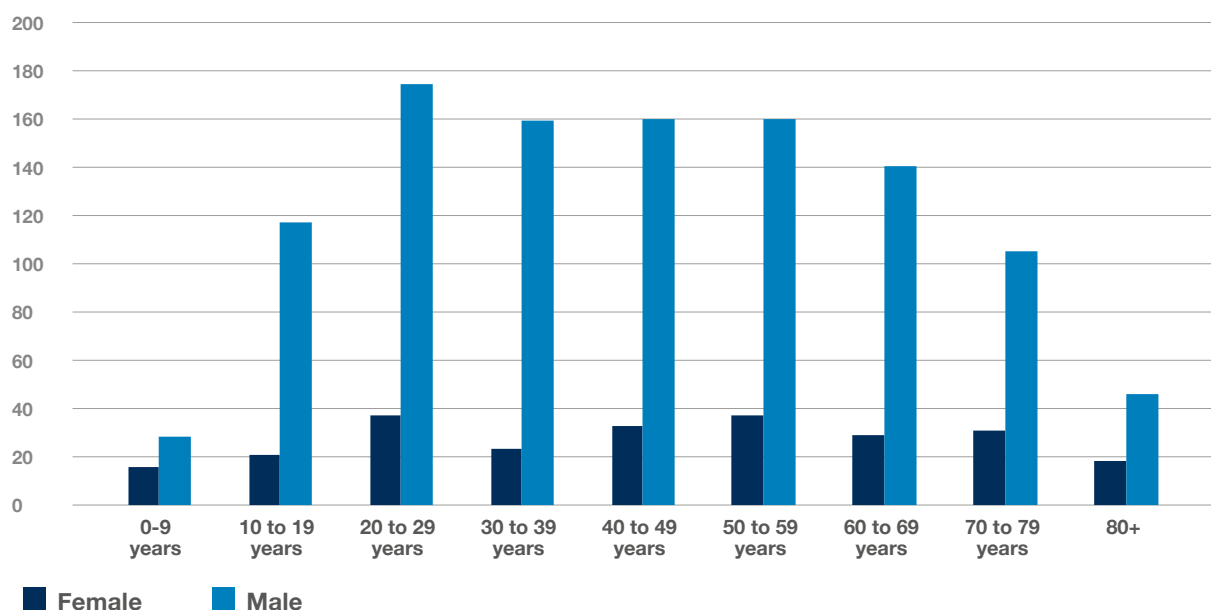


Figure 5: Accidental water-related fatalities by sex and age, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1335 (74 excluded)



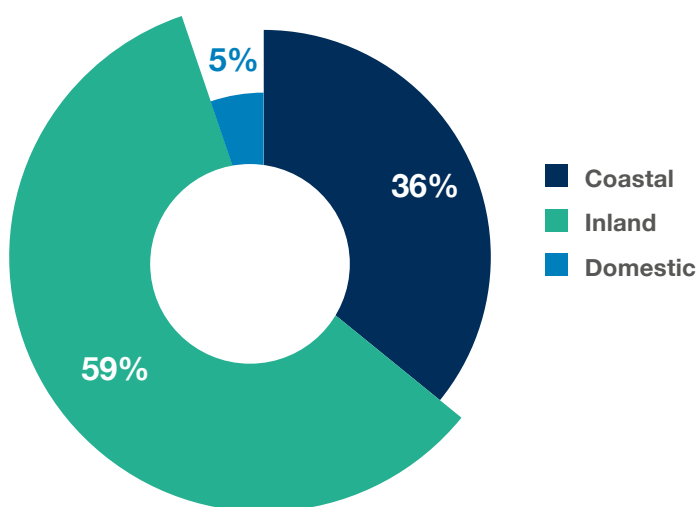
The average age of an accidental water-related fatality is 36.

- For males it is 36
- For females it is 39

Where do fatalities take place?

Over the five years (2019 to 2023), over half of accidental water-related fatalities happened at inland locations (n=800, 59 per cent) compared to coastal locations (n=487, 36 per cent) and domestic locations (n=71, 5 per cent) – see Figure 6.

Figure 6: Accidental water-related fatalities by location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1358 (51 excluded)



Inland locations

Inland locations refer to the following:

- River
- Lake/Loch/Lough
- Canal/Aqueduct
- Stream/Ditch/Burn
- Reservoir
- Pond (public realm)
- Dry ground
- Drain/Well/Pit/Culvert
- Quarry
- Marsh.

Of the 800 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred in inland locations over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 407 were at rivers (51 per cent) followed by 140 (18 per cent) at lakes/lochs/loughs (see Figure 7).

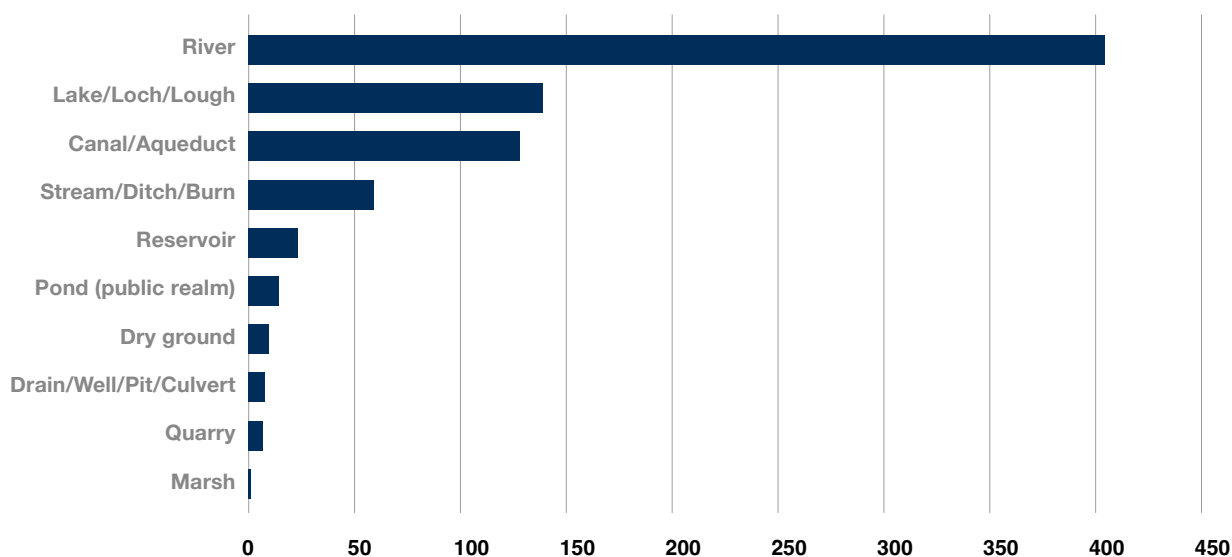


Figure 7: Accidental water-related fatalities at inland locations, five-year data (2019-2023), n=800

Coastal locations

Coastal locations refer to the following:

- Coast/Shore/Beach
- Harbour/Dock/Marina/Port
- At sea
- Estuary.

Of the 487 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred in coastal locations over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 386 (79 per cent) were at the coast/shore/beach (see Figure 8).

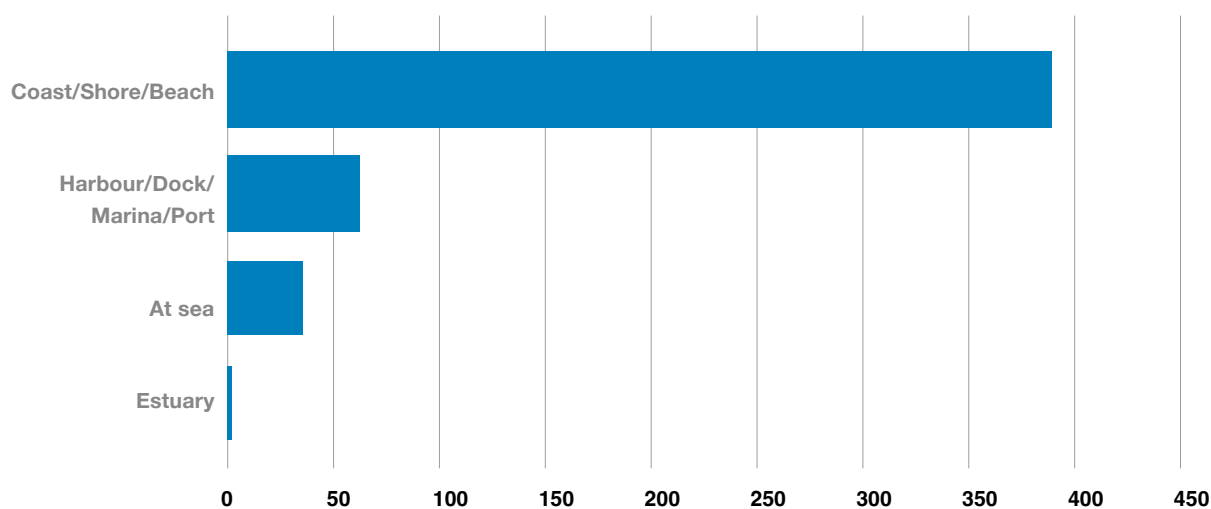


Figure 8: Accidental water-related fatalities at coastal locations, five-year data (2019-2023), n=487



Domestic locations

Domestic locations refer to the following:

- Bath
- Pond
- Hot tub
- Swimming pool
- Paddling pool
- Water container
- River
- Canal/Aqueduct
- Dry ground.

Of the 71 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred in domestic locations over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 33 (46 per cent) were in baths (see Figure 9).

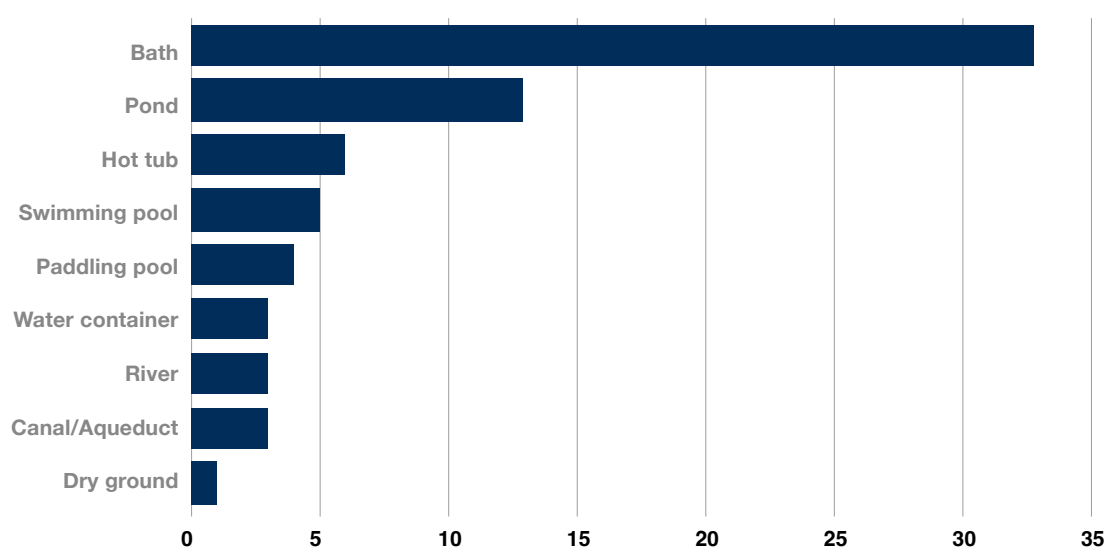


Figure 9: Accidental water-related fatalities at domestic locations, five-year data (2019-2023), n=71



When do accidental water-related fatalities take place?

Accidental water-related fatalities occur during every season of the year. However, fatalities tend to peak in the summer months (June, July, August), as can be seen in Figure 10, which shows 542 fatalities in the summer season (38 per cent).

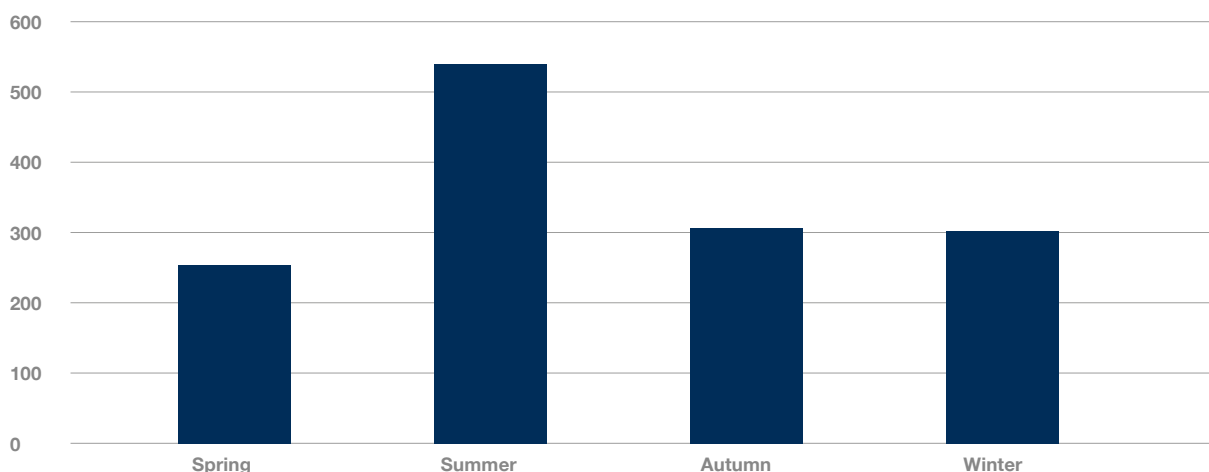


Figure 10: Accidental water-related fatalities by season, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1409

By month, July recorded the highest proportion of accidental fatalities (n=200, 14 per cent), closely followed by August (n=190, 13 per cent) – see Figure 11.

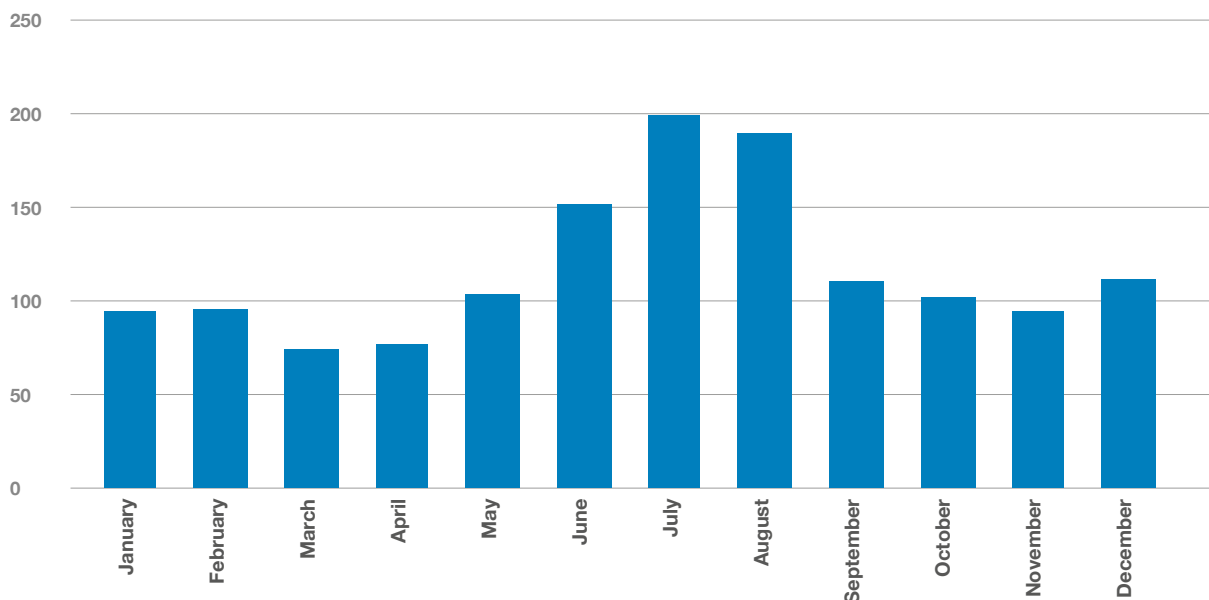


Figure 11: Accidental water-related fatalities by month, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1409



When broken down by location, July continued to be the month with the highest number of reported accidental water-related fatalities for inland and domestic locations. At the coast, August had the highest number of reported accidental water-related fatalities (see Figure 12).

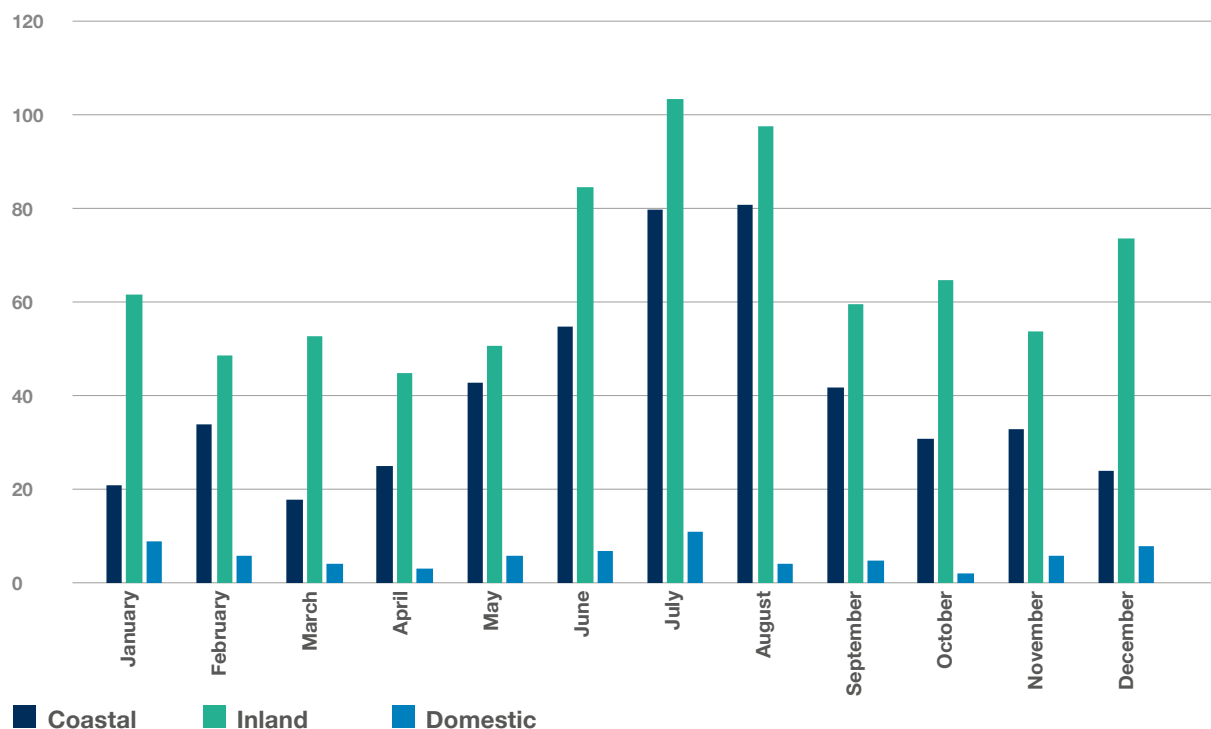


Figure 12: Accidental water-related fatalities by month and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1358 (51 excluded)

Although accidental water-related fatalities happened across the full week, 518 (37 per cent) of them happened at the weekend (see Figure 13).

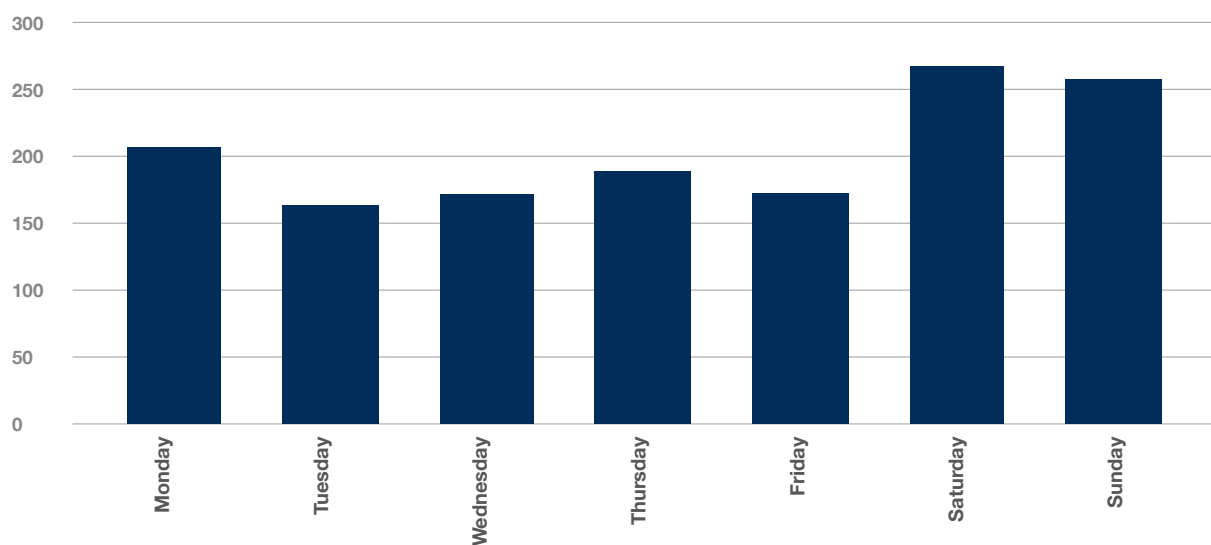


Figure 13: Accidental water-related fatalities by day of the week, n=1409



Over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), when broken down by location, Saturdays and Sundays at inland locations reported the highest numbers of accidental water-related fatalities (see Figure 14).

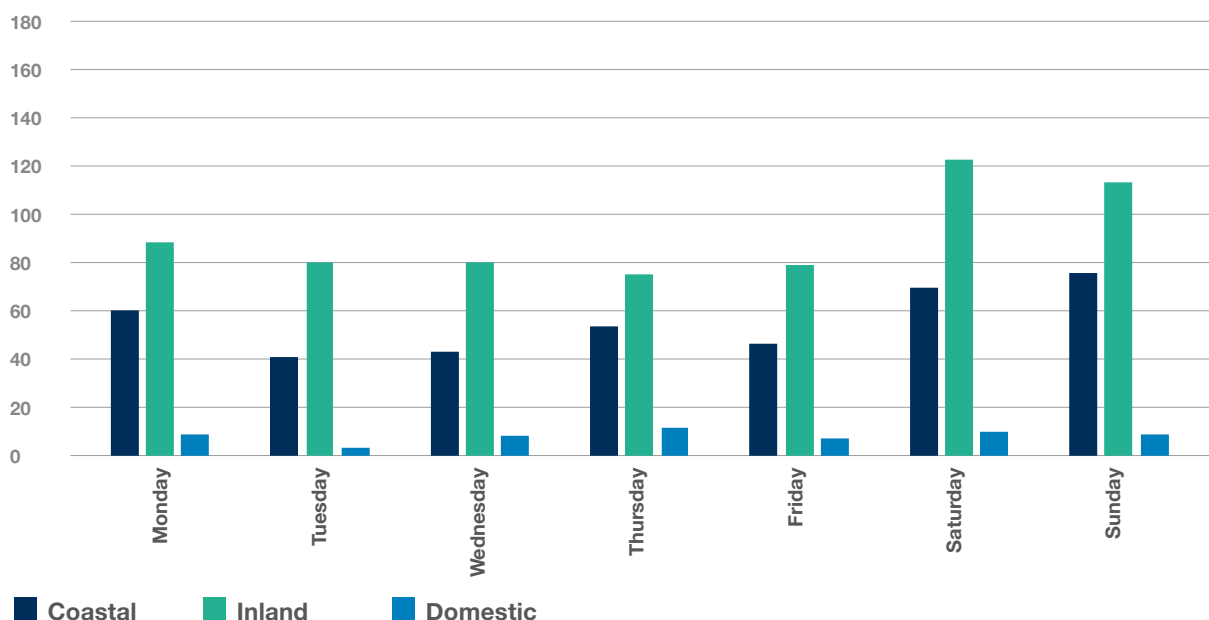


Figure 14: Accidental water-related fatalities by day of week and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1358 (51 excluded)

What activities were people doing?

Accidental water-related fatalities occurred following a wide range of activities. The majority occurred following a recreational activity (n=622, 46 per cent), whilst 42 per cent (n=565) occurred during everyday activities where entering the water was not expected, such as walking, running or cycling (see Figure 15).

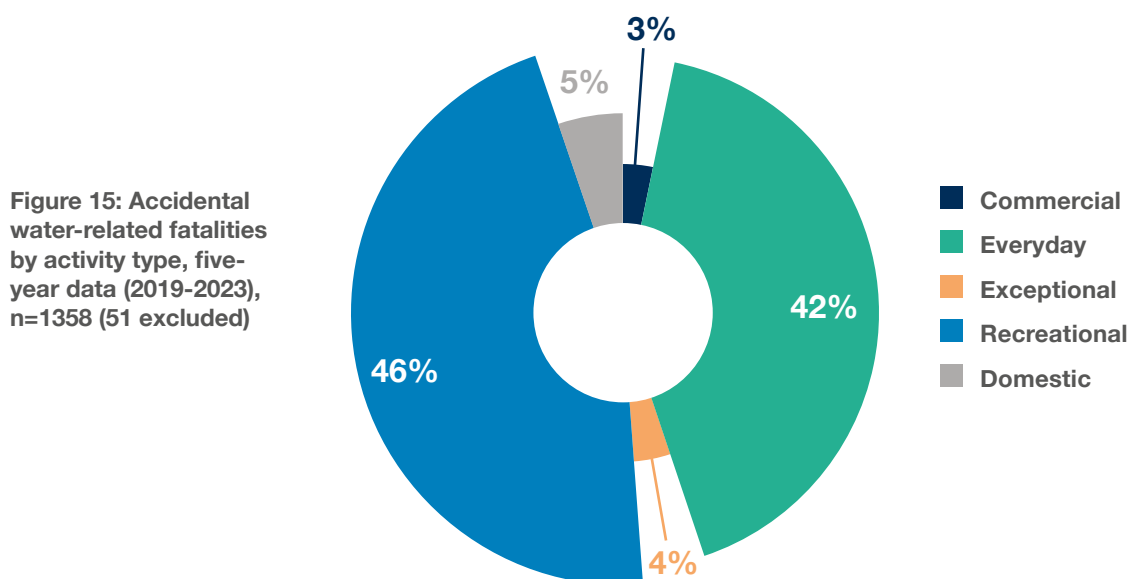


Figure 15: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity type, five-year data (2019-2023), n=1358 (51 excluded)



Recreational activities

Of the 622 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred due to recreational activities over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 189 (30 per cent) happened whilst participating in swimming (see Figure 16). When looking at the location of the five most frequent recreational activities, swimming at the coast accounted for most fatalities (n=104).

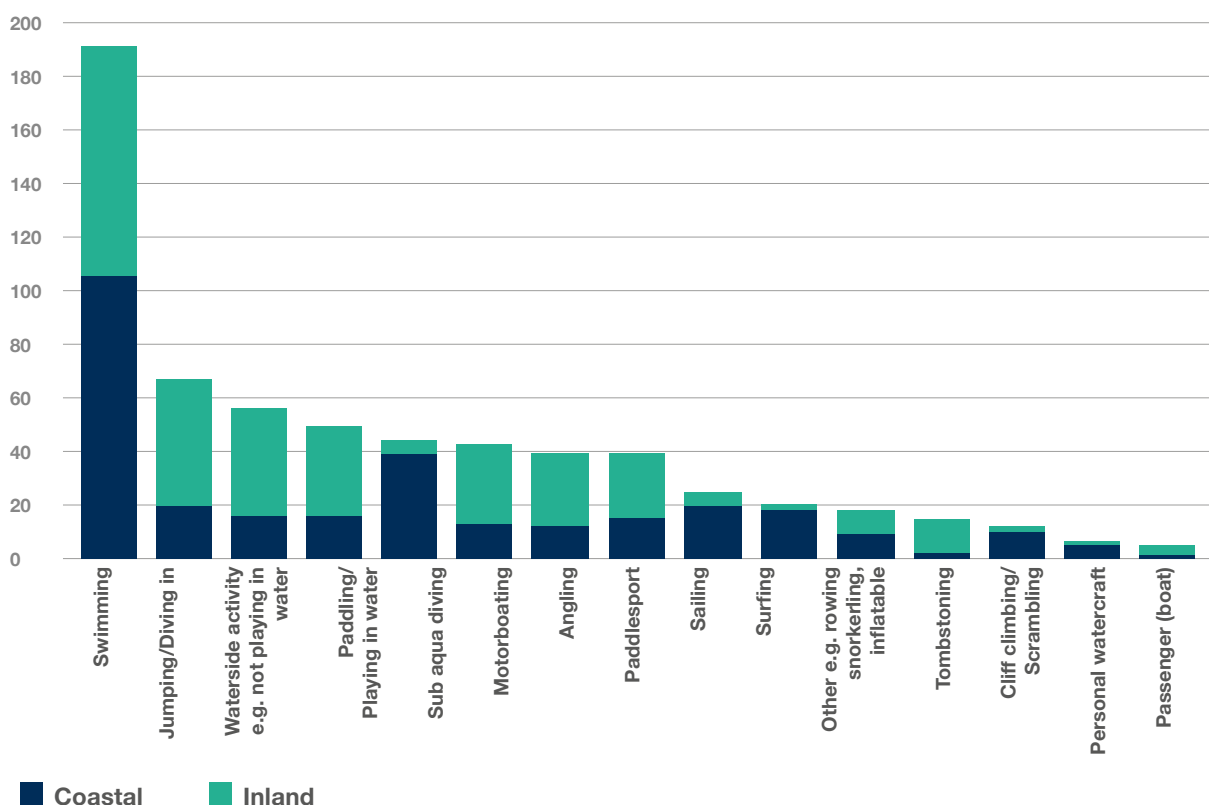


Figure 16: Accidental water-related fatalities by recreational activity type and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=622



Everyday activities

Of the 565 accidental water-related fatalities that happened as a result of everyday activities, 495 (88 per cent) were the result of walking (see Figure 17).

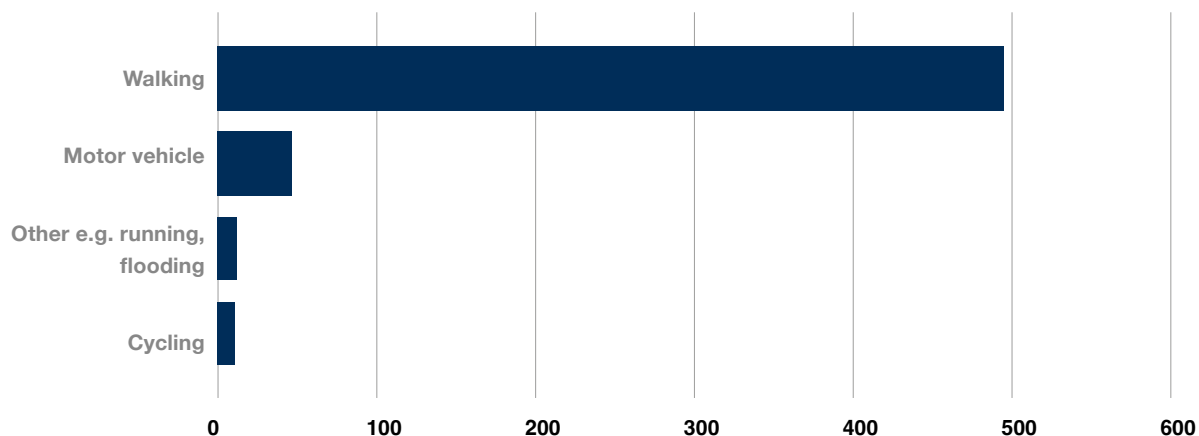


Figure 17: Accidental water-related fatalities by everyday activity type, five-year data (2019–2023) n=565

When looking at the location of everyday walking, inland locations accounted for 75 per cent (n=369) of accidental fatalities (see Figure 18).

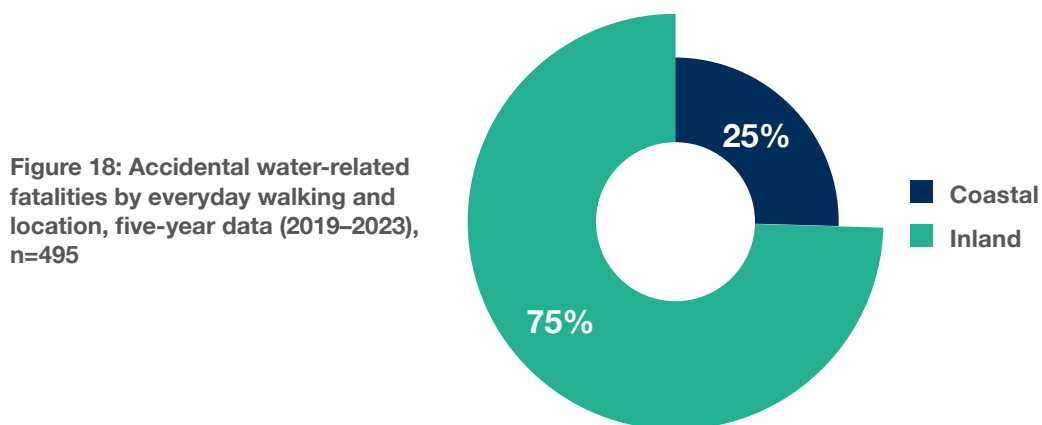


Figure 18: Accidental water-related fatalities by everyday walking and location, five-year data (2019–2023), n=495



The presence of alcohol/drugs

The presence of alcohol/drugs was reported in 442 (31 per cent) of accidental water-related fatalities. Figure 19 provides the year by year and the five-year average, Over the five years (2019 to 2023), there has been a downward trend in the number of fatalities that included alcohol/drugs.

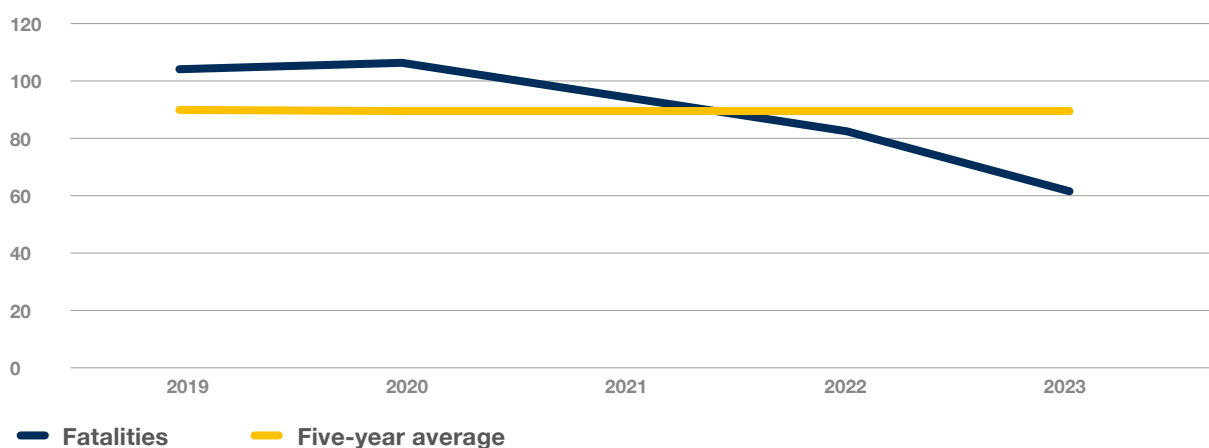


Figure 19: Presence of alcohol/drugs in accidental water-related fatalities by five-year data (2019-2023) and five-year average

Priority locations

Inland

As shown in Figure 7, 407 (51 per cent) of inland water-related fatalities over five-year period (2019 to 2023) happened at rivers.

When looking specifically at rivers, males account for the highest number of incidents accounting for eight in ten of accidental water-related fatality deaths (see Figure 20). Males aged 20 to 29 are the most frequent casualties.

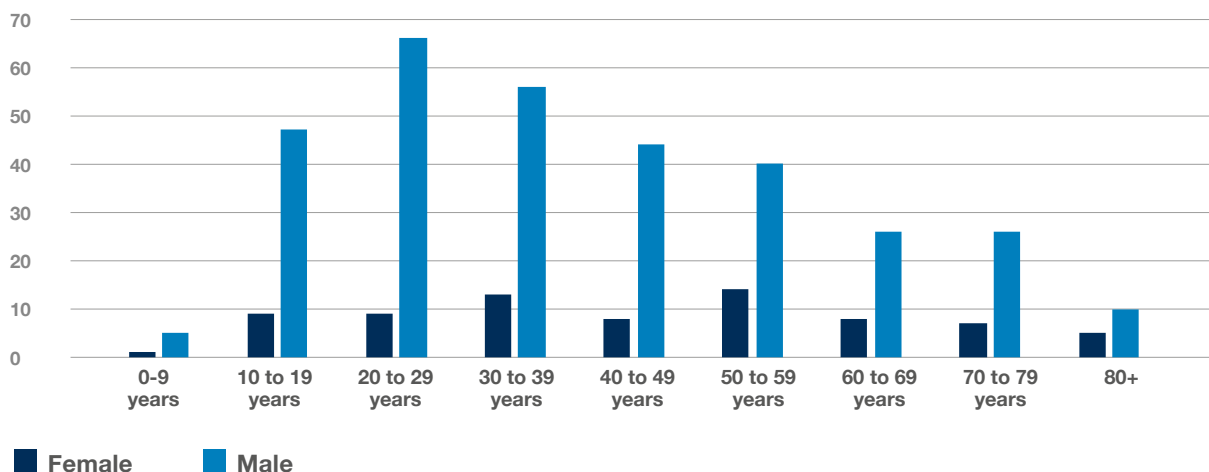
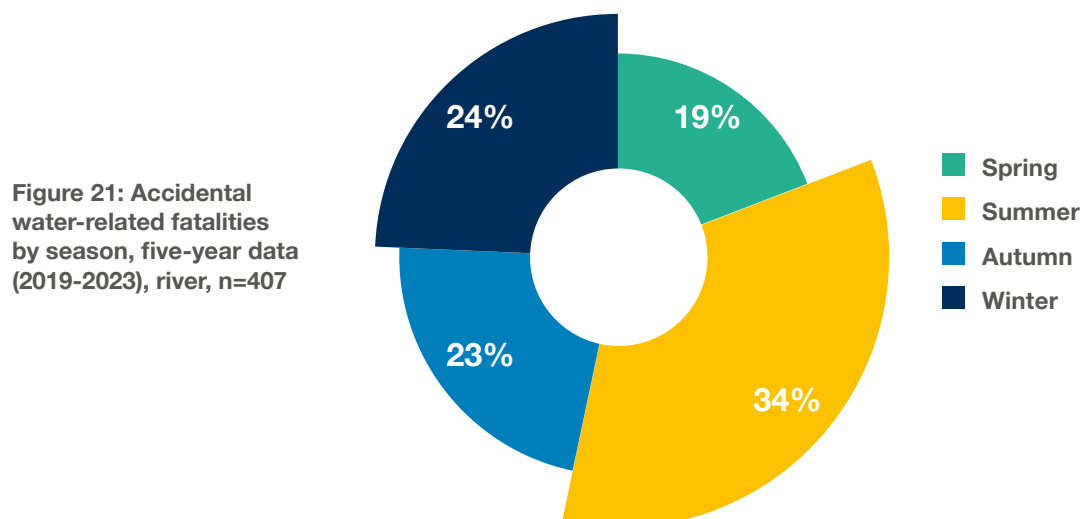


Figure 20: Accidental water-related fatalities by sex and age, five-year data (2019-2023), river, n=394 (13 excluded)



Accidental water-related fatalities at rivers occur most frequently in the summer months during (June, July, August), as can be seen in Figure 21, which shows 34 per cent fatalities in the summer.



In terms of activity at rivers, the majority occurred as a result of five activities, with walking accounting for most (n=178) – see Figure 22.

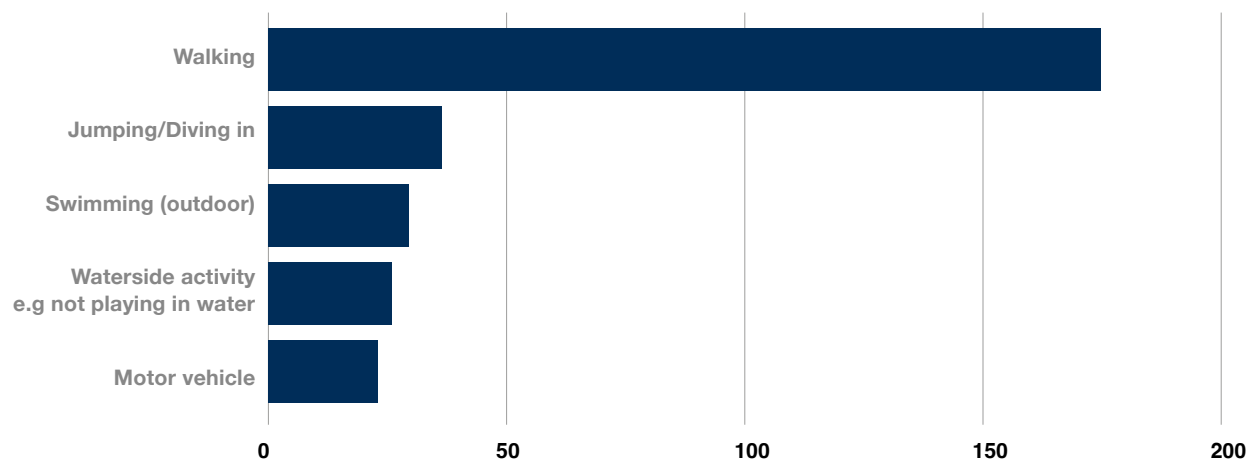


Figure 22: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity, five-year data (2019-2023), river, (n=294, 113 other activities)

The presence of alcohol/drugs was reported in 150 (37 per cent) of accidental water-related fatalities at rivers.



Coastal

As shown in Figure 8, 386 (79 per cent) of coastal water-related fatalities over five-year period (2019 to 2023) were at the coast/shore/beach.

Males account for the most incidents, accounting for eight in ten of accidental water-related fatality deaths at the coast/shore/beach (see Figure 23). Males aged 60 to 69 are the most frequent casualties.

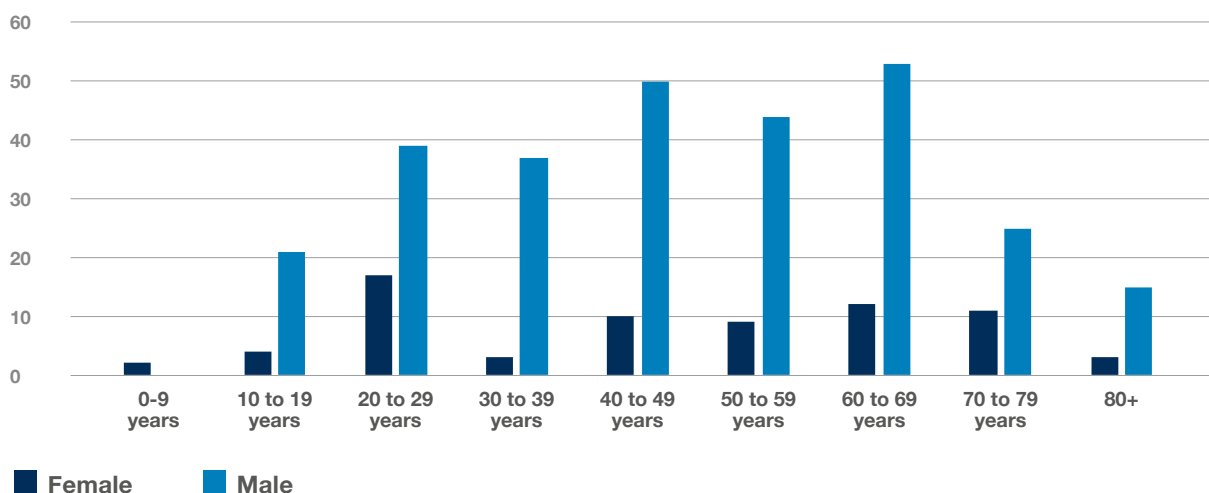
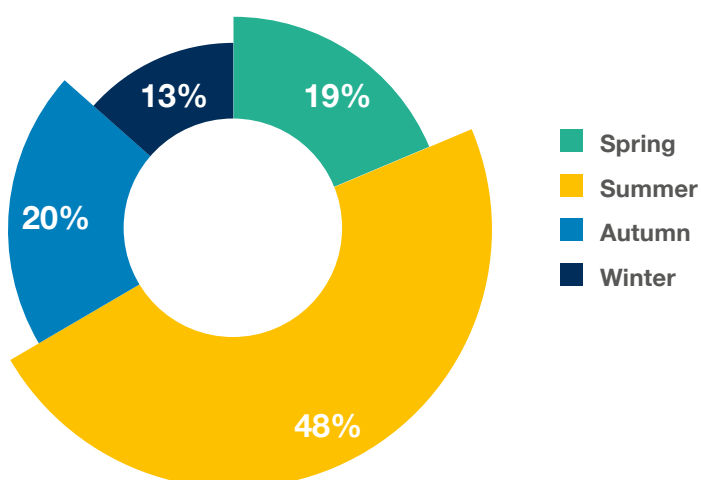


Figure 23: Accidental water-related fatalities by sex and age, five-year data (2019-2023), coast/shore/beach, n=355 (31 excluded)

Accidental water-related fatalities at the coast/shore/beach occur most frequently in the summer months (June, July, August), as can be seen in Figure 24, which shows 48 per cent fatalities occur during the summer.

Figure 24: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity, five-year data (2019-2023), coast/shore/beach, n=386





In terms of activity at the coast/shore/beach, the majority of fatalities occurred as a result of six activities, with swimming (outdoor) accounting for most (n=98) see Figure 25.

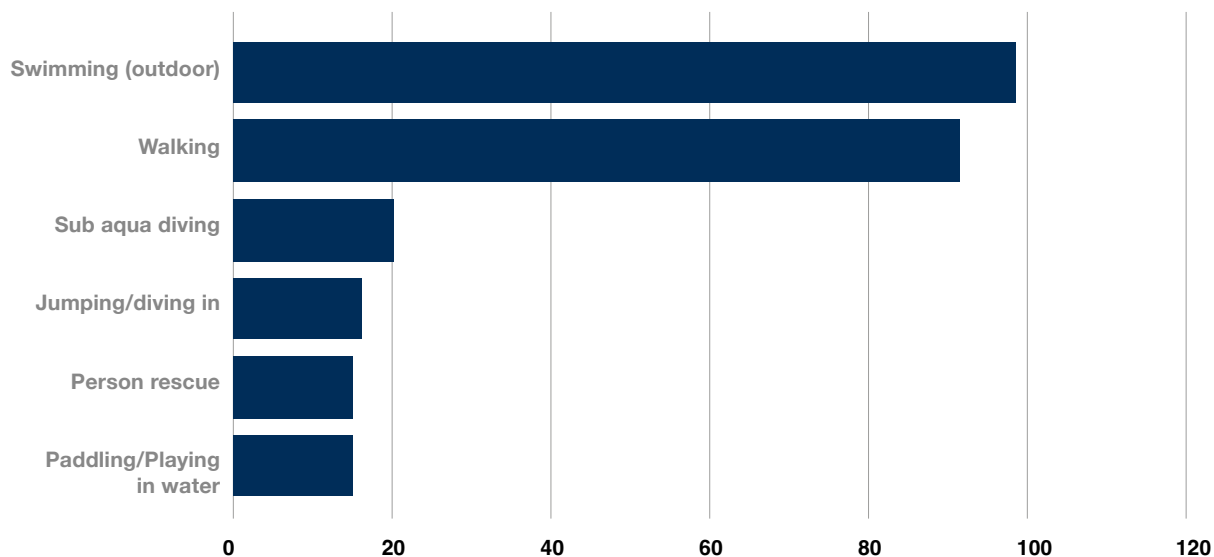


Figure 25: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity, five-year data (2019-2023), coast/shore/beach (n=255, 131 other activities)

The presence of alcohol/drugs was reported in 72 (19 per cent) of accidental water-related fatalities at the coast/shore/beach.



Notes on the data

All data used are from WAID 2019 to 2023 (v2) unless otherwise noted.

Population rate figures use ONS mid-year data from the Mid-2024 edition of the data.

Overall water-related fatalities include: accidental, suicide, crime and inconclusive.

Accidental fatalities refers to suspected/confirmed accidental causes and natural water-related causes. Suicide fatalities refers to suspected/confirmed suicide causes.

Inconclusive refers to incidents where intent has not been able to be categorised.

Where figures have been excluded due to limited information, this has been clearly indicated by category (e.g. n=394; 13 excluded).

WAID taxonomies for activity:

- Commercial activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded as commercial
- Domestic activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded in a domestic/residential setting
- Everyday activities where the deceased did not intend to be in the water (e.g. people who were walking, running and cycling next to water)
- Exceptional activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded as exceptional e.g. person/animal rescue
- Recreational activities where the activity was recorded as sports or a water-based activity.



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