

Speech by Heather Humphreys TD

Minister for Rural and Community Development

At the Launch of Be Summer Ready 2021 Campaign

Wednesday 21 April 2021

10am

Introduction

Good morning everyone.

I'm delighted to be here with my colleagues, Ministers Coveney and Naughton, to launch the 'Be Summer Ready 2021' campaign.

Can I begin by saying that the work carried out by all the agencies involved in today's event happens round the clock, night and day.

Sometimes, that can go unnoticed.

So whether it's Water Safety Ireland, the Coast Guard, Met Éireann and all the other agencies and stakeholders represented here today - I want to pay tribute to you and say thank you on behalf of the Government and the Irish people.

Your work will be even more important this summer, as more people choose to holiday at home due to the Pandemic.

Water Safety Ireland

As Minister for Rural and Community Development, I have responsibility for the governance of Water Safety Ireland.

Raising awareness of the potential dangers associated with water-based activities, and educating people in swimming, lifesaving and water safety is a fundamental role for the organisation.

There is no doubt that its efforts to educate and change attitudes and behaviours leads to lives being saved.

Water Safety Ireland is a volunteer-led organisation.

Without doubt, the past year has demonstrated how important the role of volunteers has been and will continue to be as we exit the shadows of Covid-19.

Drownings happen irrespective of a pandemic and our volunteers are actively adapting and planning ways to continue delivering their invaluable work to save lives.

The staff and volunteers involved are a credit to their organisations and their families and I am deeply thankful for everything they do to make the summer a safe and enjoyable one for visitors to our waterways.

Lifeguards

The training of our lifeguards has continued under Level 5 restrictions as it is classed as an essential service.

Water Safety Ireland is to be commended in how it adapted its lifeguard training programme in line with health restrictions.

This was done to ensure that we would avoid a shortage of personnel on our beaches this summer.

I would also like to take this opportunity to urge anyone who comes across a damaged or missing ring buoy to report it immediately to their local authority or at www.ringbuoys.ie.

Ring buoys have been a critical piece of equipment in helping to save countless lives over the years, and I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to have them available in cases of emergency.

A key role of Water Safety Ireland is around raising awareness, providing consistent messages about how to stay safe in and around water.

This could not happen without the partnership of the media and I'd also like to acknowledge the vital role media organisations play in helping to highlight the importance of water safety and the need for us all to be vigilant on or near water.

Drownings

Thankfully, the number of drownings in Ireland is falling.

Nonetheless, we still average 120 drownings a year. That's 10 every month.

Ireland's 10 Year National Drowning Prevention Strategy, launched in 2018, aims to reduce the number of drownings by targeting at-risk groups, particularly children.

Every death by drowning is a tragedy for the family, friends and communities of the victim.

So my big message here today is let's all work together to minimise these tragedies.

Through the efforts of the organisations involved in this morning's launch, hundreds of people are saved every year from drowning and thousands receive first aid.

So as we all adhere to government guidelines and restrictions, I urge everyone to take extra care of yourself and your loved ones near any waterways, and be extra vigilant during holidays when we can naturally let our guard down.

Water safety needs to be a part of the conversations we have with our loved ones.

That's why campaigns such as the 'Be Summer Ready' initiative are so important.

We all can play our part in protecting families all over Ireland.

I want to see everyone enjoying the wonderful water environments that we are so lucky to have here, especially during holidays and warm weather.

Follow the information and tips in the Be Summer Ready campaign, and together we can enjoy a safe and happy summer on our beaches, lakes and rivers.

Staying safe is a message that resonates strongly with the pandemic.

But it should also be one that we all immediately think of when we are in or around water.

Thank you.