

**Speech by Minister Coveney for launch of the
'Be Summer-Ready' 2021 Campaign
21 April 2021, NECC**

As Chair of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, I am delighted to be here today alongside my Ministerial colleagues to jointly launch the 2021 'Be Summer Ready' campaign.

While Covid-19 restrictions may impact where we can go and what we can do, there are still some standard safety precautions that we should not forget. As the weather improves and, hopefully, as Covid-19 restrictions change, more people are likely to visit the countryside, engage in outdoor pursuits and visit family farms. Unfortunately, the summer months also come with a higher level of risk of fatalities from causes such as farm accidents, increased road incidents and accidental drownings. Wildfires also increase in the summer and they pose serious risks to life and property.

It is more important this year than ever that we ensure that we are more vigilant with regard to our personal safety when working or visiting the coast, lakes, rivers or our countryside so that we can all safely enjoy our natural amenities while avoiding additional, unnecessary pressure on our emergency and front line services.

Water safety is an issue for every person in Ireland and we have a specific focus on it in this year's campaign. Ireland has some of the most wonderful waterways and beaches in the world. They are very popular, particularly during the summer months. Unfortunately, they can also be the scenes of tragic accidents. I want everyone here in Ireland to be able to enjoy our amenities but equally we need to have a healthy respect for our aquatic environments. Everyone should know how to stay safe in the water and it is important that we also teach this to our children.

Almost half of the population of Ireland lives within 5 kilometres of the sea and practically everyone lives within 20 kilometres of either the sea, a lake or a river. We also expect that this summer will see increased visitors to these areas as people holiday at home. So we are asking everyone to **“Be Alert to Water Safety”**.

I would like to highlight that this public safety campaign represents a ‘Whole of Government’ approach. As well as advice around water-based activities, the campaign has information on dealing with many other summer-related issues such as high temperatures, drought, the dangers of wildfires, keeping safe in the sun and on the farm and many other things we should keep in mind.

The ‘Be Summer-Ready’ website, the ‘Be Summer-Ready’ information booklet and the “Be Alert to Water Safety” leaflet all provide very practical advice on summer preparations.

The information they contain has come from many Departments and Agencies, such as the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Health and Safety Authority and Met Éireann, who have worked together to contribute in a collective way to developing this valuable advice.

You can find all the information gathered together on the website: www.gov.ie/summerready. I would ask you all to take some time to explore this site and to read the booklet and the leaflet. The Office of Emergency Planning in my Department will also be sharing relevant advice and information through social media over the summer months.

I am delighted that so many of our media are represented at the launch here today. You play a key role in raising public awareness across a broad range of public health and safety topics. I am asking for your assistance again today in helping to get this campaign message out to the public.

I would like to take a moment now to recognise the commitment and dedication of our front line responders and the work of our Local Authorities in maintaining essential services throughout the year. We also have many wonderful individuals, community groups and voluntary emergency services who provide support day in, day out. The best way of thanking them is to be alert to our own safety and to not take unnecessary risks. While Covid-19 restrictions may impact where we can go and what we can do, let's all remember to stay safe this summer.

I will now hand over to my ministerial colleagues, Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister of State Hildegard Naughton. They will provide you with further information about the work of their Departments in developing this campaign. Their areas of responsibility include the Coast Guard and Water Safety Ireland and they have provided key input and advice into developing our public safety messaging.

Thank you.

ENDS