



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

Message from President Michael D. Higgins

World Drowning Prevention Day

25 July 2024

Mar Uachtarán na hÉireann, and as Patron of Water Safety Ireland, I am delighted to extend my heartfelt support to World Drowning Prevention Day, one that serves as a critical reminder of the importance of water safety and the collective effort needed to prevent drowning incidents. May I thank Water Safety Ireland for all their work in promoting this important initiative.

Our seas, rivers, lakes and oceans are precious resources, essential for the survival of our fragile planet. They are not only central to our identity as an island nation but they are also vital to our livelihoods, recreation and tourism, in particular to our many enjoyable leisure activities.

This summer, many of our citizens will spend increasing amounts of time enjoying water-based activities and sports. For most, they will be enjoyable days that will end well. But sadly, we can also anticipate that the good weather will also see accidents at our beaches, rivers, canals or swimming pools. This occurrence of accidents should concern us all and we must never cease in our urging of greater care and compliance with good regulation and advice.

In Ireland, drowning remains a significant issue. In the 5 years between 2017 and 2021 there was an average of 118 drownings per year. While this is down from an average of 140 per year from 2012 to 2016, this is still a stark, sobering figure, one that highlights the dangers of the water and the importance of the correct safety precautions when engaged in activity near our coastlines and inland waterways.

Behind each of those figures is the lost potential and possibilities of a precious life, and the parents, spouses, sons, daughters or siblings whose own lives are changed irrevocably, often in the space of just a couple of minutes.

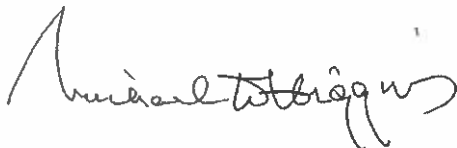
Drowning is a preventable tragedy. By promoting water safety awareness – such as learning basic swimming and rescue skills, knowing how to float and what to do in an emergency, always wearing a properly fitted lifejacket when boating or participating in water sports, never leaving children unattended near water, understanding local water conditions, including currents and tides, and respecting warning signs – we can reduce these numbers.

As we observe this year's World Drowning Prevention Day, let us commit to making water safety a priority in our communities.

I urge all of you to respect the water, never to underestimate its strength and to avoid taking the unnecessary risks that can so easily lead to tragedy, loss and heartbreak.

By doing so, we can honour the memory of those lost and prevent future tragedies.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Michael D. Higgins', followed by a stylized flourish.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland