



**water safety**  
Scotland

# Accidental Drowning Fatalities in Scotland: Males Aged 40+

**An Analysis of the 2017 - 2021 WAID Data (Scotland)**



accidents don't have to happen

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**Author(s):** C McAvoy, J Foley

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# Introduction & Limitations

In 2018, RoSPA released an [analysis on drowning fatalities](#) (years 2012 – 2016) for males aged 60 – 69 as [Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy](#) found that this demographic made up the majority of accidental drowning fatalities.

An updated analysis was undertaken for the [Interim Review of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy](#) which showed a change in the predominant demographic of those accidentally drowning with a shift to males over the age of 40.

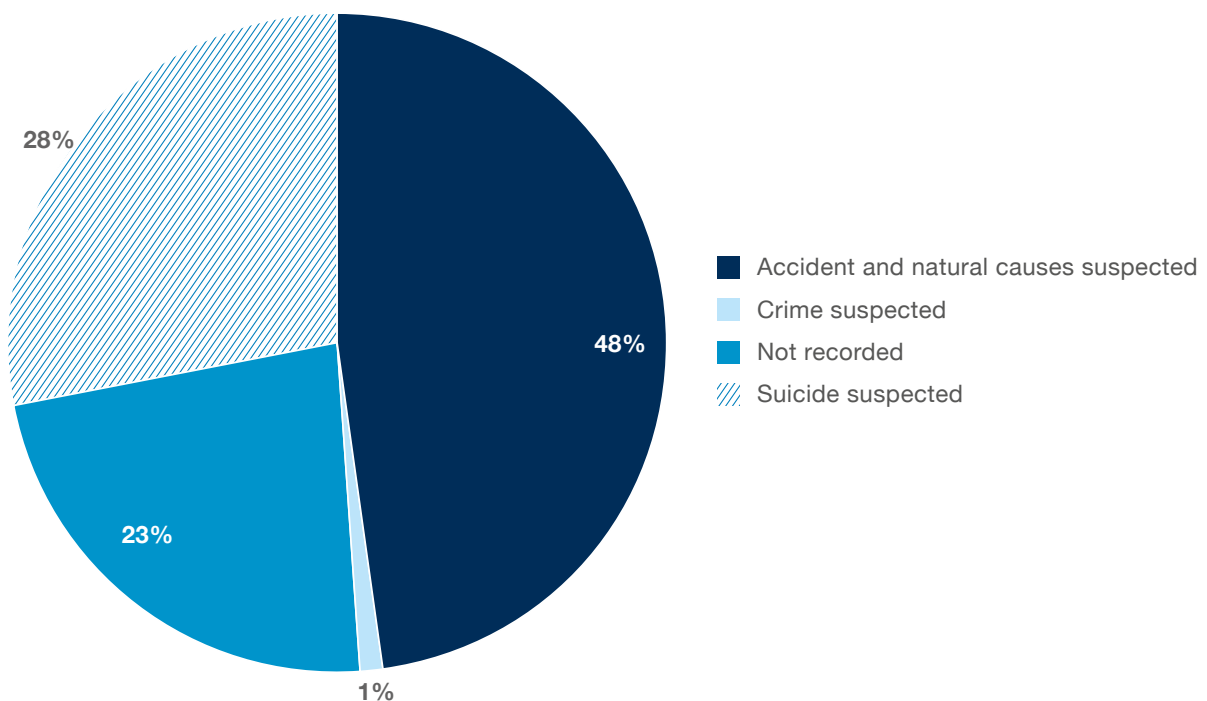
No specific analysis has been undertaken of these age groups since. This report therefore concentrates on this using data from the Water Incident Database (WID) over the period 2017 – 2021

It should be noted that as the core data providers develop and improve data verification and completeness of records, the data (particularly 'crime suspected' and 'suicide suspected') is subject to change. Throughout the report, the term 'accidental' refers to both accidental and natural cause of death. Where possible, all data is reported; if this is not possible we indicate the number of records counted in the analysis, i.e n=33

# Analysis & findings

## Overview

Over the five-year period, there were 473 water-related fatalities in Scotland. Of these, 48 per cent were identified as 'accidental' (n = 226). See Figure 1.



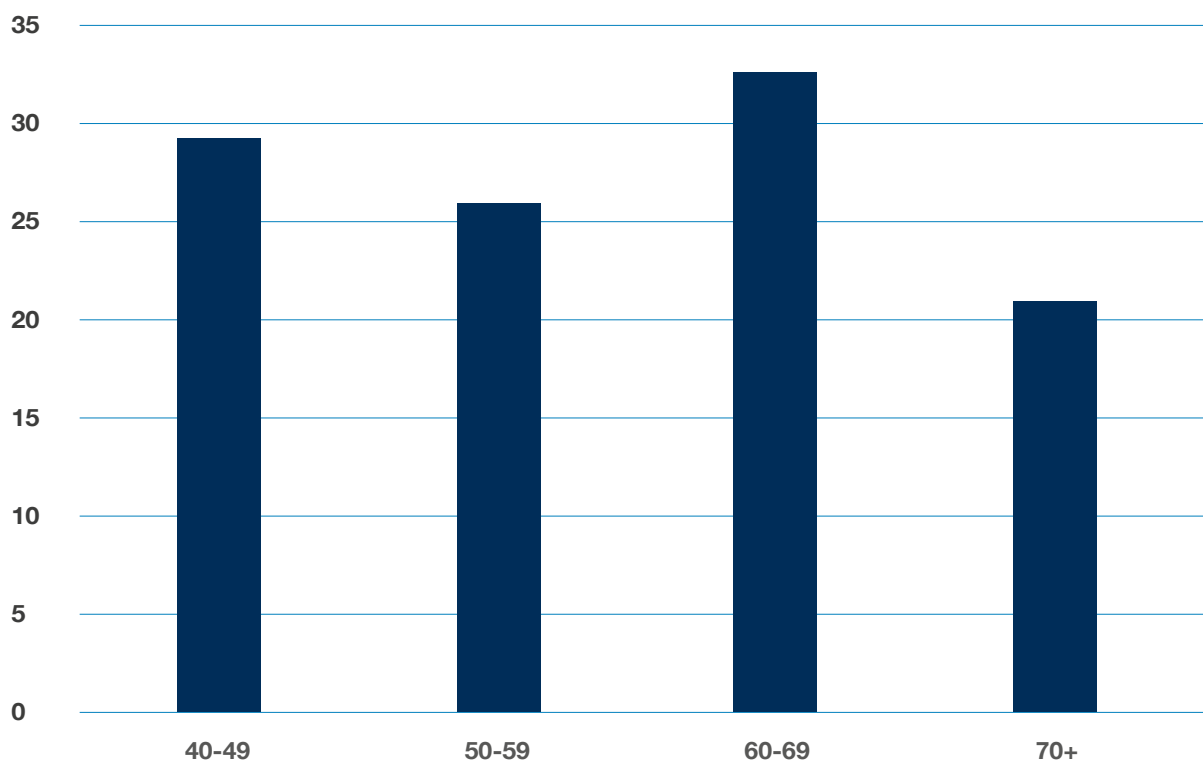
**Figure 1:** Overall water-related fatalities, n=473 by outcome percentage (Scotland, 2017-2021)

Of the 226 accidental fatalities over the five year period, 109 were males over the age of 40 (48 per cent).

Please note that the following analysis and subsequent pages relates only to the 109 males over the age of 40.

## Age

There were relatively similar results for age category – with males aged 60 – 69 the most frequent victims of fatal accidental drownings.



**Figure 2:** Accidental fatalities by male aged 40+, n=109 (Scotland, 2017-2021)

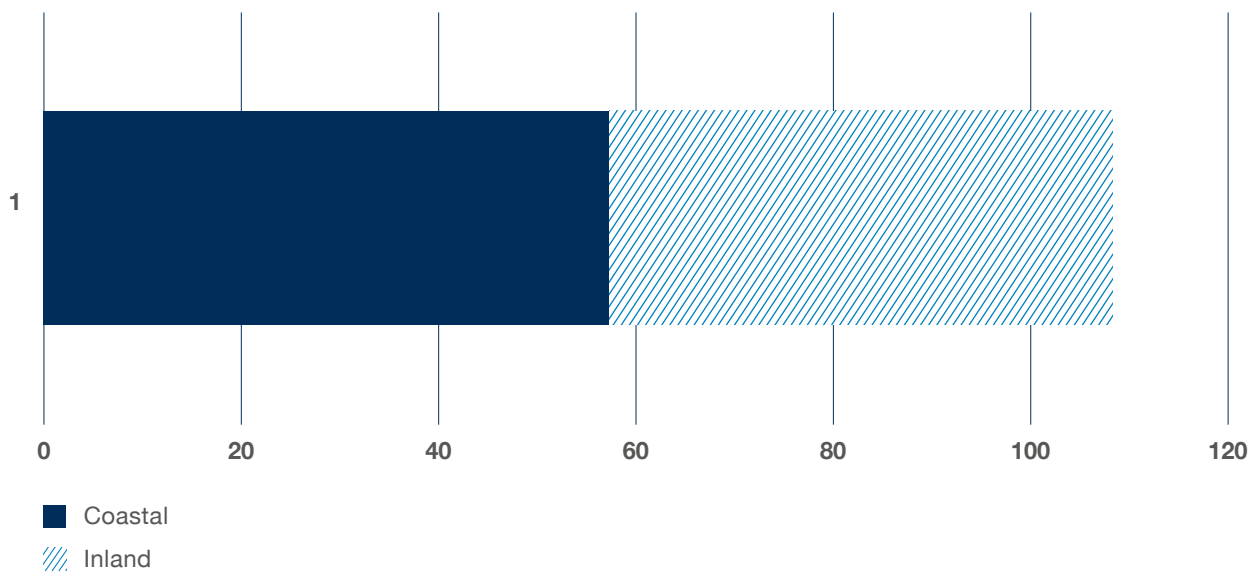
The average age of male accidental fatalities within this group was 59 years.

## Environment

In terms of the location of accidental fatalities over the five-year period, the events were evenly split between inland and coastal waters – although coastal areas had slightly more fatalities (see figure 3).

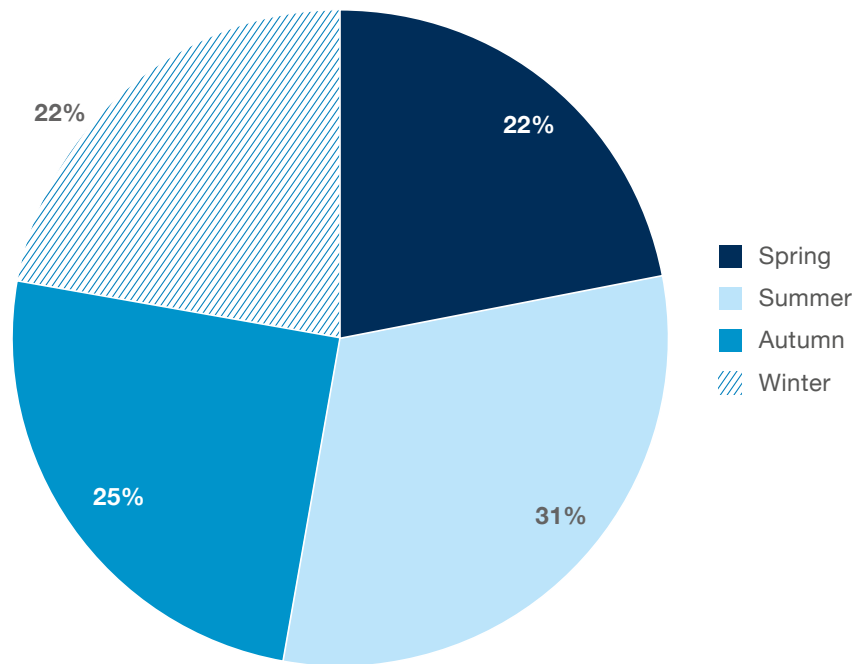
Fatalities due to drowning happen all year round. Summer<sup>1</sup> in particular accounted for the most accidental fatalities in the male 40+ age group (31 per cent) with the month of July recording the highest number of accidental drowning fatalities over the year (n = 14). See figure 4.

Thursday was identified as the most common day for an accidental drowning fatality in this age group (n=19). See figure 5.

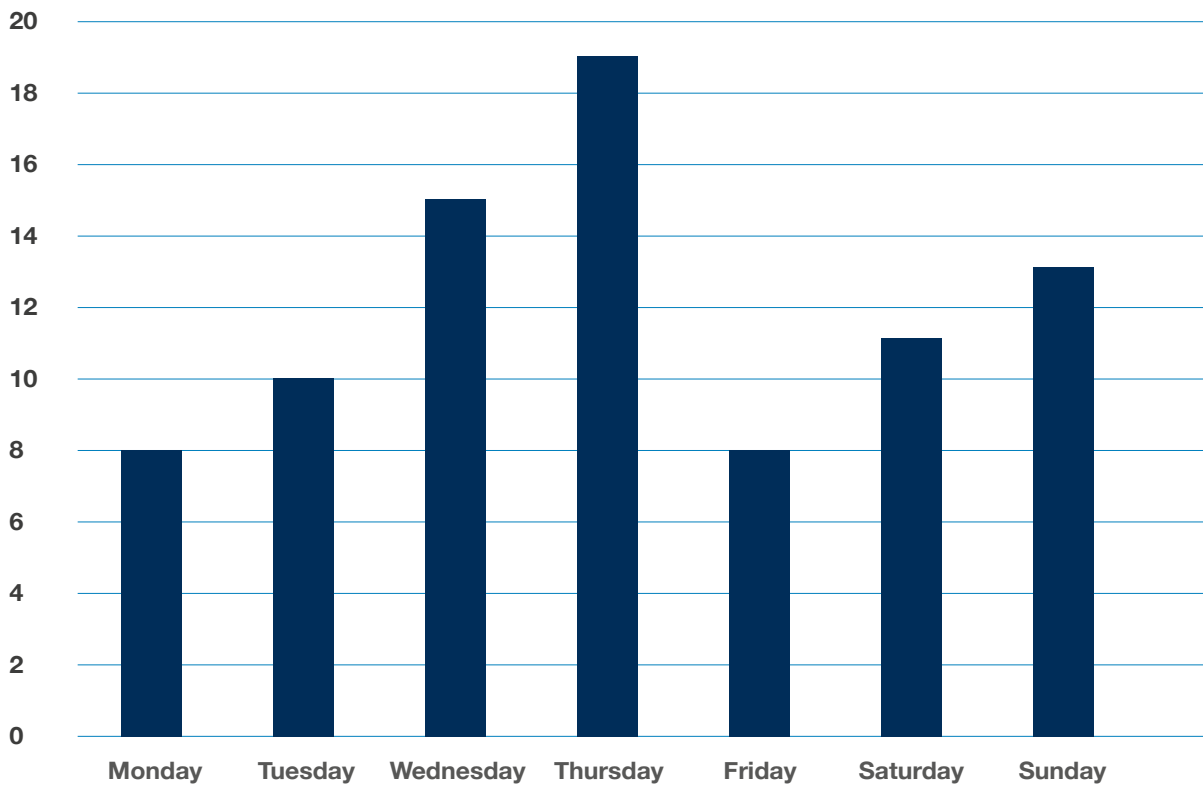


**Figure 3:** Accidental fatalities by location, male aged 40+, n=109 (Scotland, 2017-2021)

<sup>1</sup> Seasons have been broken down as: Spring (March, April, May), Summer (June, July, August), Autumn (September, October, November) and Winter (December, January, February).



**Figure 4:** Accidental fatalities by season, male aged 40+, n=109 (Scotland, 2017-2021)



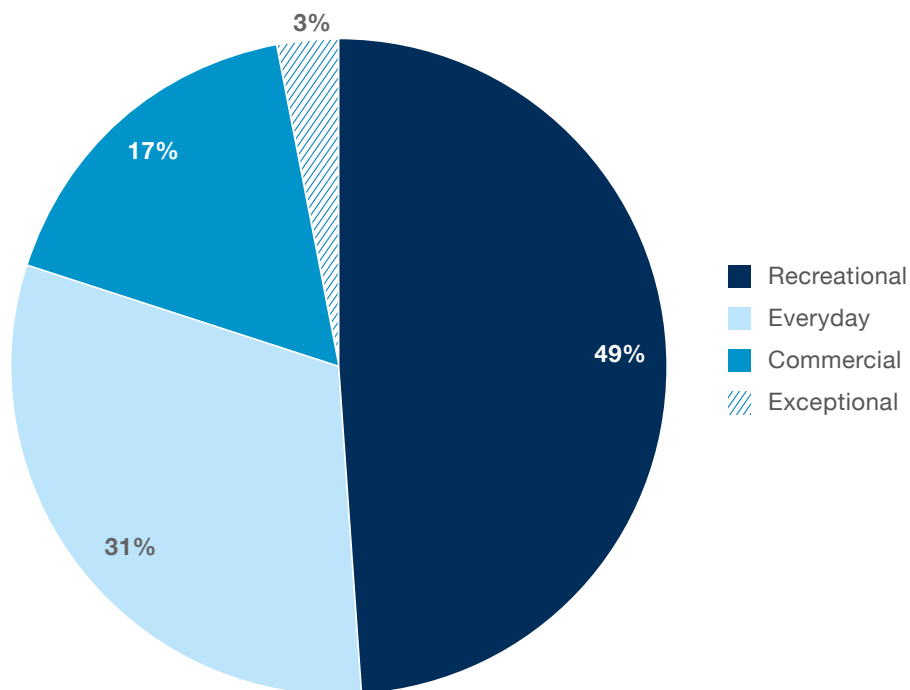
**Figure 5:** Accidental fatalities by weekday, male aged 40+, n=84, 25 not recorded (Scotland, 2017-2021)

## Activities

When looking at the activity prior to the accidental fatality, recreational water activities accounted for almost half (49 per cent, see figure 6).

The majority of the recreational fatalities were the result of the following activities, in order of frequency:

- Sub aqua diving (37 per cent)
- Angling (17 per cent)
- Swimming (13 per cent)
- Motorboating (13 per cent)<sup>2</sup>

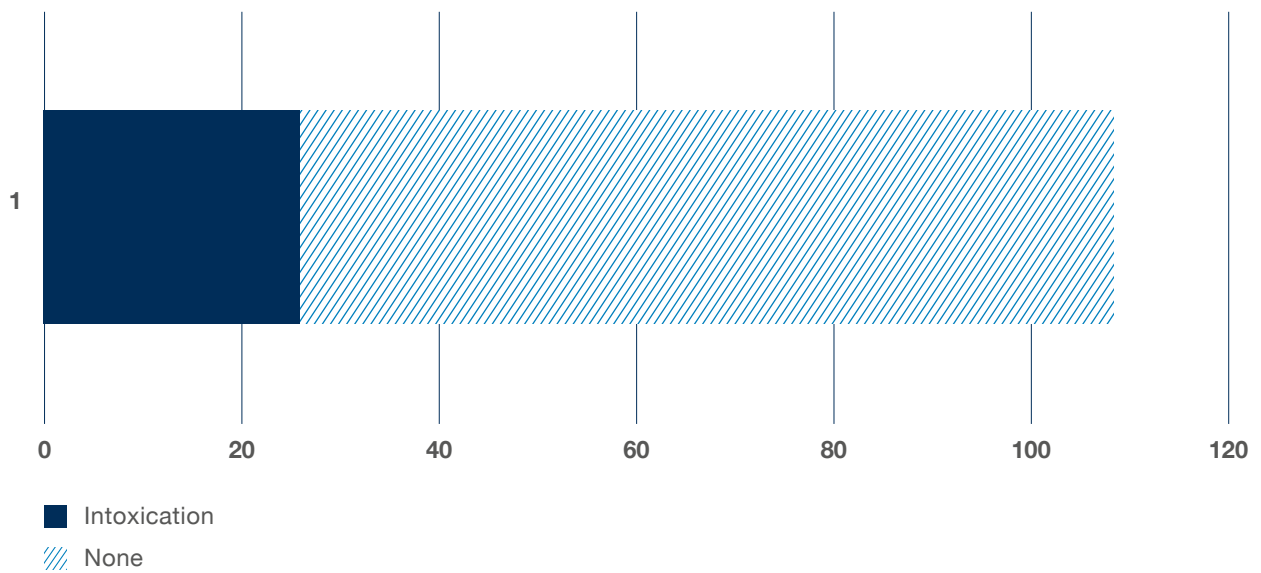


**Figure 6:** Accidental fatalities by activity, male aged 40+, n=106, 3 not included (Scotland, 2017-2021)

<sup>2</sup> The remaining percentages was made up of other recreational activities such as surfing, windsurfing etc

## Intoxication

The analysis found that 24 per cent of the fatalities had suspected intoxication at the time of death (see figure 7). This statistic should however be interpreted cautiously and noted as 'suspected'.



**Figure 7:** Accidental fatalities by intoxication, male aged 40+, n=109 (Scotland, 2017-2021)



# Conclusion

No insights into this age and demographic in Scotland has taken place since 2018. This report has revealed a number of key points which have some unique differences to the analysis carried out in 2018. However any comparison must be interpreted with caution as this analysis expands the age group under investigation to include ages 40 – 59.

The research reveals the following information:

- **There were 109 accidental fatalities during the five-year period of men over the age of 40**
- **The average age of a fatality was 59**
- **Half of the accidental fatalities happened at the coast**
- **Summer accounted for the most fatalities**
- **Thursday was the most common day for a fatality**
- **Approximately half of accidental fatalities were the result of recreational water activities**
- **Sub-aqua diving and Angling were the leading cause of recreational drowning fatalities**
- **Intoxication was suspected in 24 per cent of cases**

It is hoped that this information will be useful for campaign and awareness-raising and can be used to help Water Safety Scotland focus effort to help reduce fatalities.

