

An analysis of water-related fatalities and injuries suffered by Canadian tourists in the Dominican Republic

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Background

The Dominican Republic has become one of the most frequently visited sun destinations for Canadian tourists, with more than 690,000 Canadians travelling to the Dominican Republic in 2007 [Foreign Affairs & International Trade Canada, personal communication, June 19, 2009]. There have been media reports surrounding the issue of Canadian tourists who have suffered water-related fatalities, or injuries while visiting the Dominican Republic. Despite the noted public concerns, the issue surrounding these water-related incidents has not been examined closely, and remains an open area of research.

Preliminary research conducted by the Lifesaving Society indicated that the incidence of water-related fatalities and injuries in the Dominican Republic involving Canadian tourists is unknown, and that water-related incidents of Canadian tourists have not been well documented.

Objective

To determine the incidence rate, circumstances, and contributing factors of water-related fatalities and injuries suffered by Canadian tourists visiting the Dominican Republic for the period of 2004–2009.

Methods

The Lifesaving Society received permission from the Water Incident Research Alliance (WIRA) to modify an existing, validated data collection form from the Canadian surveillance system for water-related fatalities for use in this research. WIRA is dedicated to delivering research data regarding water-related incidents, injuries, and fatalities occurring across Canada. Following modification of the data collection tool, we elicited the assistance of the research and analysis service of Foreign Affairs & International Trade Canada to review the CAMANT database, and complete data collection forms for all reported unintentional water-related fatalities and injuries (N=16) involving Canadian tourists in the Dominican Republic between 2004–2009. Once data collection was complete, consular staff reviewed the completed forms for accuracy, and completeness. A scan of media reports was conducted to determine if there were any incidents that had not been captured by the CAMANT database. In the final stages of this analysis, the Lifesaving Society reviewed the collected data and prepared a final report comparing the results to the trends for water-related fatalities and injuries documented in Canada.

Results

In the period of 2004–2009, 13 Canadian tourists visiting the Dominican Republic suffered an unintentional water-related fatality, and three sustained water-related injuries. The majority of these incidents occurred in unsupervised areas, and involved a recreational activity where the decedents had intended on entering the water. 92% of these water-related fatalities were males with an average age of 46. There was insufficient data available to determine whether alcohol was a contributing factor in any of these water-related fatalities.

Conclusions

The incidence rate for water-related fatalities involving Canadian tourists in the Dominican Republic is low with only 13 fatalities occurring over a period of five years. In 2004, 245 water-related fatalities and 1103 water-related injuries occurred in Canada (1). Given these trends, and the fact that incidents are not well documented, it is likely the incidence of water-related injuries for Canadians in the Dominican Republic are significantly underreported. To develop prevention strategies, it is vital to improve the tracking system used to record the water-related incidents involving Canadian tourists in the Dominican Republic.

Further research should examine the surveillance and reporting systems currently used to track water-related incidents worldwide, and should also investigate how water-related incidents involving Canadians compare with other nationalities visiting the Dominican Republic, as well as the trends worldwide.

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References:

1. Smart Risk Canada (2009). The Economic Burden of Injury in Canada. Retrieved from: www.smartrisk.ca

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