



News Release

Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District

1503 First Street South, Nampa, Idaho 83651 ~ Tel: (208) 466-7861
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CHILD DROWNINGS IN IRRIGATION CANALS **THE TARGET OF NMID SAFETY CAMPAIGN**

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For Media Information Contact:
Daren Coon - 466-7861

Drowning is the leading accident cause of death for children up to four years old in our country and the second leading cause of accidental death for all kids up to age 14, according to the Centers for Disease Control. And Idaho has had the second highest unintentional drowning rate in the nation for the 1 to 5 year-old age group.

Those grim statistics are at the heart of the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District's summer canal safety campaign that launches across the Treasure Valley on Monday (May 28). It marks the 12th consecutive year NMID has conducted the canal safety campaign. The Nampa & Meridian canal safety efforts of the past 12 years also have been given official recognition. Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter formally recognized the District's safety efforts by issuing a special proclamation declaring May 27-June 2 as "Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District Canal Safety Recognition Week" in Idaho.

"People just don't seem to realize how dangerous canals are for children. Statistics show that the majority of Idaho's child drownings are directly tied to a lapse of adult supervision for less than five minutes. The message we want parents to get is just how deadly that five-minute lack of supervision can be for children and young people," said Daren Coon, NMID Secretary Treasurer.

The TV commercial was videotaped on the bank of NMID's Ridenbaugh canal and is specifically designed to illustrate just how quickly a child can be swept away if they should fall into a canal. At the beginning of the commercial, Jessi Huizinga, a Meridian mother of three, asks parents if they believe they could save their child if it fell into the canal.

The Ridenbaugh Canal flows at about 3 miles per hour – 4.5 feet per second – at the point the commercial was videotaped. Using a small child's shoe as a prop, the commercial demonstrates that in just two minutes, a child would be swept 540 feet away by the cold river water. In five minutes the child would be 1,350 feet, a full quarter mile, down the canal from where they fell in.

"Do you still think you can save your child?" Huizinga asks.

The safety campaign will air five full weeks of television commercials and Spanish language radio spots to warn area residents about the drowning dangers for children posed by the District's 80 canals and drains snaking for 500 miles across Ada and Canyon County. The ads will run every other week until August.

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The potential for canal drownings goes up sharply when school ends and the weather heats up. The District's ditchriders are constantly checking their areas, alert for people who may be near or even playing in the canals.

"The hot weather of summer time is generally when we encounter the most number of young people in and around our 500 miles of canals," Coon said. He added it is not unusual for the District's ditchriders to find people tubing or swimming in the District's canals, especially the larger Ridenbaugh Canal.

Governor Otter cited NMID in his proclamation for efforts that have "benefited and served the interests of all citizens of Southwestern Idaho, including more than 30 other irrigation districts, by promoting a canal safety program that extends far outside the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District boundaries to wherever canals are found."

"The fundamental aim of this outstanding individual organizational effort has been and continues to be the prevention of drowning deaths of children and young people and therefore reflects the highest values of Idaho and its people," the Governor noted.

Photo Caption: Meridian Mom Jessi Huizinga and Kraig Spille of KIVI TV Productions set up the next shot of a canal safety commercial videotaped on the bank of the Ridenbaugh Canal. (NMID Photo)

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