



# News Release

## Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District

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### **NMID LAUNCHES ANNUAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO PREVENT IRRIGATION CANAL DEATHS**

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Consider this: Idaho has the second highest rate of unintentional drowning in the nation for children 1 to 5 years old with a rate of 6.14 children per 100,000 population, a death rate second only to Florida, according to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

With thousands of miles of area canals and drains now full with water, here are a few other grim statistics from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Nationally, more children ages 1 to 4 die from drowning than any other cause except birth defects;
- Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 1 to 14 years, and the fifth leading cause for people of all ages.



**An element of a new Nampa & Meridian Irrigation district canal safety commercial featuring Meridian mom Jessi Huizinga is videotaped in the empty Ridenbaugh Canal by Kraig Spille of KIVI Productions. (NMID Photo)**

Those somber statistics are just part of the reason, Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District, the area's largest irrigation district, will launch its summer canal safety outreach campaign on May 26. It marks the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year NMID has conducted the canal safety campaign designed to warn area residents about the drowning dangers posed by the District's 80 canals and drains that snake across Ada and Canyon County.

"Many people somehow just don't really understand how dangerous irrigation canals are for children. Research shows the majority of Idaho's child drownings are the direct result of a lapse in adult supervision of less than five minutes. Our goal is to help parents better comprehend just how deadly that five-minute lack of supervision can be," said Daren Coon, NMID Secretary Treasurer

This year's campaign features a pair of 30-second TV spots that will air on local television through the middle of August. The District will also broadcast a pair of Spanish-language safety commercials throughout the summer on the area's leading Spanish language station.

The TV spots feature Jessi Huizinga, a 37-year old Meridian mother of three, and are designed to illustrate how quickly a child can be swept away if they should fall into a canal. A second spot illustrates other canal drowning dangers such as the steep banks, swift flowing water and frigid water temperatures that can quickly result in hypothermia.

The first spot features Huizinga standing in an empty canal where she illustrates just how deep the canal is and the steepness of the canal sides which hinder people trying to get out.

In the second commercial, Huizinga demonstrates how in just two minutes, a child could fall in a canal and be swept 540 feet away by the cold river water. In five minutes the child would be a full quarter mile down the canal from where they fell in.

The potential for canal drowning goes up sharply when school ends and the weather heats up, NMID officials said. The District's ditchriders are constantly checking their areas, alert for people who may be near or even playing in the canals. Despite the fact that canals are private property and trespassing is not allowed, the combination of hot weather and cool flowing water can be a powerful but potentially deadly attraction.

"The hot weather of summer time is generally when we encounter the most number of young people in and around our canals and drains," 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.

**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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