

Promoting Water Safety Awareness and Youth Education in Nevada County: A Call for Expanded Outreach During Water Safety Week

Summary

This examines the critical importance of youth water safety education in Nevada County, California, with a focus on promoting initiatives during Water Safety Week. As natural bodies of water across the region draw residents and visitors for recreation during spring and summer, drowning remains a preventable yet persistent public health concern. The paper highlights best practices for drowning prevention, supports expanding community outreach and educational programs, and advocates for strategic partnerships with local agencies, including fire departments, state and federal land managers, and nonprofit organizations.

1. Introduction

Nevada County, nestled in the Sierra Nevada foothills, boasts numerous lakes, rivers, and recreational water areas that attract families, youth, and visitors throughout the spring and summer seasons. However, these natural amenities also pose significant risks. On average, Nevada County rivers experience five drownings annually, with projections indicating higher risks during periods of increased water flow, such as the anticipated 8,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) this year ([Nevada Union High School, n.d.](#)). Cold water temperatures, often in the upper 40s to low 50s Fahrenheit, further exacerbate the dangers, leading to rapid loss of motor skills and increasing the likelihood of drowning.

Water Safety Week serves as a critical opportunity to raise public awareness and promote practices that reduce the risks of injury or death in and around water. Educating youth on water safety is essential to preventing accidents and empowering young people to make safe choices near pools, rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water. Expanding youth-focused safety programs and outreach efforts can help reinforce water safety messages and ensure that all children—regardless of economic status—have access to lifesaving knowledge and resources.

2. The Urgency of Water Safety Education for Youth

Youth are particularly vulnerable to drowning due to inexperience, lack of formal swim instruction, and underdeveloped risk perception. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that approximately 4,000 fatal unintentional drownings occur in the United States each year—averaging 11 deaths per day—with children ages 1–4 having the highest drowning rates (CDC, 2022). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) emphasizes the need for early swim education and environmental hazard reduction to prevent drowning (AAP, 2021).

Formal swim lessons have been shown to reduce drowning risk by up to 88% in children aged 1–4 (Brenner et al., 2009). However, barriers such as cost, transportation, and limited access to instruction disproportionately affect underserved families. By focusing on free or low-cost programs, local governments can reduce these barriers and ensure equitable access to lifesaving education.

3. Community-Based Strategies for Outreach and Impact

A collaborative, community-based approach is essential for effective water safety education. Public agencies such as fire departments (with water rescue training), California State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) all play crucial roles in safeguarding recreational water areas and educating the public.

Local fire authorities, in particular, have frontline experience with water-related emergencies and are well positioned to provide real-world context in safety lessons. Joint programming—such as water rescue demonstrations, workshops, and school-based presentations—has the potential to engage youth and families while delivering critical information in accessible ways.

By collaborating with trusted agencies and incorporating culturally and linguistically relevant materials, Nevada County can broaden the reach and impact of its Water Safety Week initiatives.

4. Recommendations for Nevada County

To address water safety concerns proactively, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Expand Water Safety Week Programming** – Organize events, demonstrations, and workshops during Water Safety Week that focus specifically on children and teenagers.
2. **Continue Partnering with Public and Private Entities** – Maintain working relationships with Yuba River Public Safety Cohort, California State Parks, USFS, BLM fire departments and local media to provide integrated water safety education.
3. **Develop a Year-Round Education Model** – While Water Safety Week can serve as a focal point, ongoing initiatives—particularly in schools and community centers—are essential for long-term impact.

These recommendations align with national best practices and can help build a local culture of safety and preparedness.

5. Conclusion

Drowning is a preventable tragedy, and the youth of Nevada County deserve access to the education and resources needed to stay safe around water. Through expanded outreach, targeted programming during Water Safety Week, and strategic collaboration with public safety and land management agencies, the county can take meaningful steps to reduce water-related injuries and fatalities. With continued support from the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, this initiative can serve as a model for community-driven prevention and youth empowerment.

References

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). (2021). *Prevention of Drowning*. Pediatrics, 148(5), e2021052276. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-052276>
- Brenner, R. A., et al. (2009). Association between swimming lessons and drowning in childhood: A case-control study. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 163(3), 203–210.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2022). *Drowning Facts*. <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/facts/index.html>
- Nevada Union High School. (n.d.). *Water Safety*. <https://nevadaunion.njuhsd.com/About-Us/Safety/Water-Safety/index.html>
- Nevada County Consolidated Fire District. (n.d.). *River Safety*. <https://www.nccfire.com/river-safety>
- Nevada County Superintendent of Schools. (n.d.). *Water Safety Day*. <https://nevco.org/water-safety-day/>
- Nevada County. (2024). *Stay Alert, Stay Out, Stay Alive: First Responders Conduct River Rescue Training*. <https://www.nevadacountyca.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=7537>
- Nevada County. (2024). *PG&E Urges Caution Near Rivers and Streams Due to High Water Levels*. <https://www.nevadacountyca.gov/CivicAlerts.asp?AID=7540&ARC=9770>
-

Summary: Promoting Water Safety for Youth in Nevada County

- **Problem Overview**

- Nevada County's lakes and rivers are popular but pose significant drowning risks.
- Local rivers average 5 drownings per year, often due to cold, fast-moving water

- **Why Water Safety Education Matters**

- Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death in young children.
- Cost and access barriers prevent many families from getting safety education.

- **Role of Water Safety Week**

- Timely opportunity each spring to raise awareness before peak recreation season.
- Events can include demos, rescue simulations, and workshops for youth.

- **Recommended Local Actions**

- **Expand Water Safety Week:** More events targeting youth and families.
- **Continue to Partner with Local Agencies:** Collaborate with fire departments, State Parks, USFS, and BLM.
- **Year-Round Education:** Incorporate water safety into schools and public programs.

- **Key Local Partners**

- Yuba River Public Safety Cohort
 - South Yuba River Citizens League
 - Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (river rescue)
 - California State Parks & federal land managers (USFS, BLM)
 - Local Media

- **Conclusion**

- Drowning is preventable through education, awareness, and partnerships.
- Board support can create a lasting culture of water safety and save lives.

Guiding Questions

Emergency Preparedness

- 1. How can we enhance collaboration with local agencies (e.g., Yuba River Public Safety Cohort) to expand youth-centered safety programs like Water Safety Week?**
- 2. What are the most effective outreach methods for educating youth on emergency and water safety?**
- 3. What gaps exist in current emergency preparedness programs for youth, and how can County-supported partnerships fill them?**