

TAETI • NATIONAL FATAL DROWNING SURVEILLANCE

The Drowning Report September 2026

Monthly analysis of U.S. fatal drownings, with findings and recommendations for drowning prevention organizations.

103

confirmed fatal drownings recorded nationwide in September 2026 — the lowest September in the six-year record.

PRELIMINARY • DATA AS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 2026

Prepared by the Total Aquatic Education & Training Institute (TAETI) from The Drowning Report database.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A historically low September — with risk concentrated in open water

The Drowning Report recorded **103 confirmed fatal drownings** in the United States in September 2026. That is **38.8% below** the five-year September average of 168.2 (2021–2025) and 32 fewer than the previous low, September 2025 (135). It continues the pattern of the July and August reports, both of which were also the lowest in the six-year record.

103

confirmed deaths
(7 more pending
confirmation)

–39%

vs. 5-year Sept. mean of
168.2

82%

in open water — lakes,
rivers, ponds and the ocean

10

children under 5;
6 in home pools

Key findings

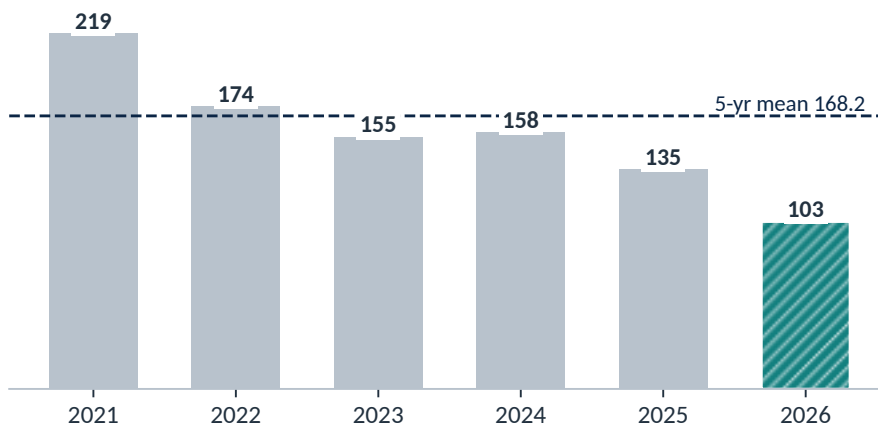
- 1 Lowest September on record, and robust to late entries.** Late reports typically add records for one to two weeks after a month closes. September would need 32 more confirmed deaths just to tie last year's low. Excluding flood deaths, the decline is 37.6% (100 vs. 160.2).
- 2 Open water is where people die.** Lakes (39), rivers (20), ponds (15) and the ocean (10) account for 84 of 103 deaths. Ponds are the only setting above their September average (15 vs. 12.0).
- 3 Boating returned as a leading circumstance.** 17 deaths (17%) involved a boat, kayak or jet ski — including three capsizes that each killed two or three people. A missing life jacket was documented in 7 deaths.
- 4 Teens did not share in the decline.** Every age group fell except 13–19-year-olds (11 vs. a mean of 10.6). Four of the 11 were 18-year-olds who died in two separate Texas incidents.
- 5 Home pools remain the leading risk for the youngest children.** 10 children under 5 died (18.6 average); six in home pools and three in ponds, including an apartment-complex retention pond in Columbus, Ohio.
- 6 Multi-fatality events drove the month.** Seven incidents claimed 17 lives (16.5%): boat capsizes in Texas, Utah and Alaska; a vehicle in the water in Maine; flash flooding on the Navajo Nation; a school field trip in Iowa; and a Texas feed yard.
- 7 Would-be rescuers died.** At least three people drowned going into the water after someone else — a 21-year-old and a 13-year-old who saved their sisters, and a 60-year-old who jumped from a boat after his dog.

Bottom line: September deaths fell sharply, but the remaining risk is concentrated and predictable: open water, boats without life jackets, older teens and young adults, toddlers near home pools and unfenced ponds, and untrained bystanders attempting rescues. Fall programming should target these groups by name.

SECTION 1 • TRENDS

September in context

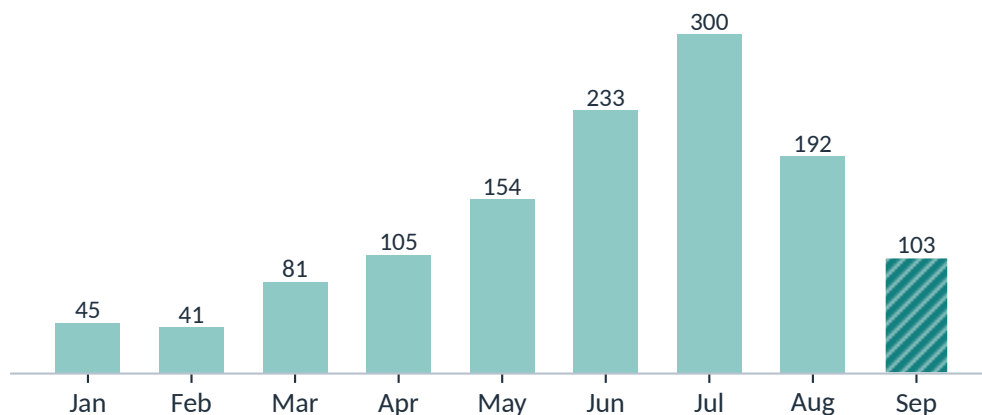
Fatal drownings in September, 2021–2026



2026 is preliminary (hatched). Dashed line = 2021–2025 September mean (168.2). September 2021 included 22 flood deaths, largely from Hurricane Ida; the flood-excluded mean is 160.2.

September counts have fallen in four of the last five years, from 219 in 2021 to 103 this year. September 2026 is 38.8% below the raw five-year mean and 37.6% below the flood-excluded mean, so the choice of baseline does not change the finding.

2026 fatal drownings by month (January–September)



Live counts from The Drowning Report as of 30 September 2026. September is preliminary.

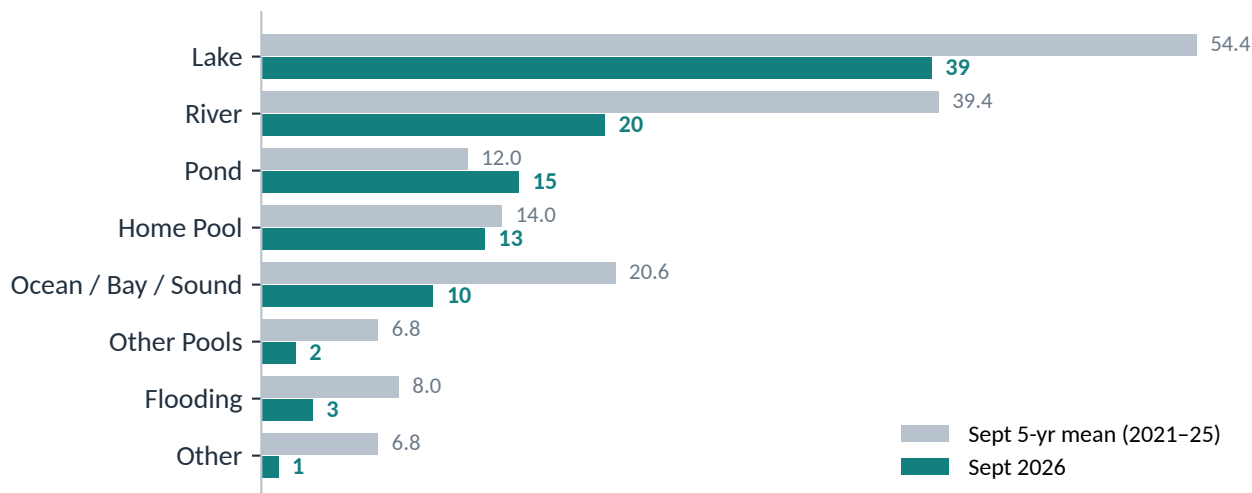
The 2026 season followed the familiar curve, peaking in July and falling through August and September. The decline from August to September (46%) is steeper than in a typical year: over 2021–2025, September averaged 65% of August's total, compared with 54% in 2026.

Labor Day weekend (4–7 Sept) accounted for 14 deaths — 14% of the month in four days — including the Falls Lake (NC) and Cannon River (MN) drownings and two Alaska fishermen lost when their skiff capsized off St. Lawrence Island.

SECTION 2 • WHERE

Where drownings happened

Deaths by location type: September 2026 vs. September average (2021–2025)

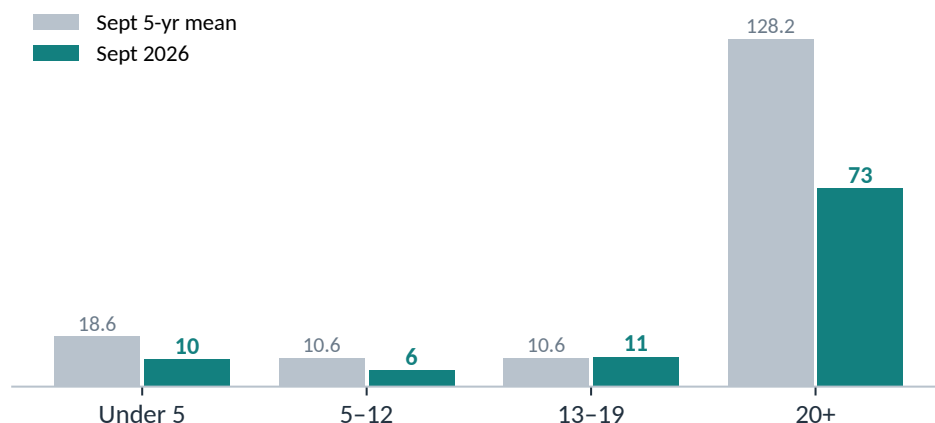


Lakes remain the single largest setting (39 deaths, 38%), followed by rivers. River and ocean deaths each fell by roughly half against their September averages. Ponds were the exception, at 15 against an average of 12 — a mix of farm and private ponds, a vehicle submersion, and toddlers in ponds near homes and apartments.

SECTION 3 • WHO

Who drowned

Deaths by age group: September 2026 vs. September average (2021–2025)



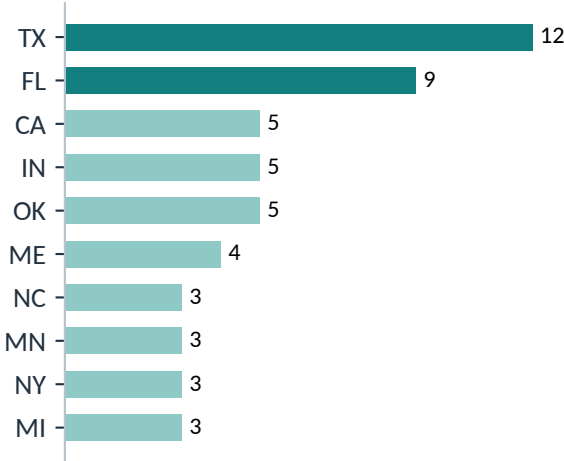
Age group was recorded for 99 of 103 deaths. Exact age is known for 67.

85% of victims were male (88 of 103), in line with the five-year September share of 84%. Adults 20+ fell the most in absolute terms (73 vs. 128.2). Teens were the only group at or above average (11 vs. 10.6). Children under 5 fell to 10 from an average of 18.6, but six of those ten deaths were still in home pools — a reminder that backyard pools in warm states remain open well past Labor Day.

SECTION 4 • STATES AND CIRCUMSTANCES

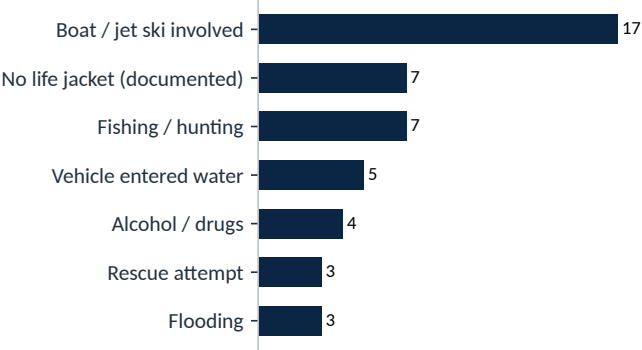
Geography and contributing factors

Top 10 states



Deaths were recorded in 37 states. Texas and Florida together account for 20%.

Documented circumstances



Recorded only where a source states it; a death can carry several. Absence does not mean the factor was absent.

Multi-fatality incidents

DATE	LOCATION	WHAT HAPPENED	DEATHS
4 Sep	Bering Sea, off St. Lawrence Island, AK	Fishing skiff capsized; a 15-year-old survived three days in the water	2
15 Sep	Sand Hollow Reservoir, UT	Jet-ski crash; neither woman wore a life jacket; operator charged with operating under the influence	2
16 Sep	Navajo Nation, NM	Flash flooding	3
19 Sep	Roque Bluffs, ME	Vehicle entered the water; a grandmother and two grandchildren aged 5 and 3	3
20 Sep	Private lake near Grapeland, Houston County, TX	Boat capsized; three young men aged 18–20 died, one swam to shore	3
22 Sep	Coralville Reservoir / Lake Macbride, IA	Teacher and 10-year-old student died during an elementary-school field trip; circumstances not yet released	2
28 Sep	Parmer County (Friona), TX	Two 18-year-old feed-yard employees found in water at their workplace	2

Seven incidents, 17 deaths: 16.5% of the month. Boating was involved in three of them (7 deaths).

SECTION 5 • RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for drowning prevention organizations

1 Make life jackets non-negotiable on every boat, kayak and jet ski — through fall

Pair "wear it, don't stow it" messaging with fall fishing and hunting seasons, and support boating-under-the-influence enforcement. Target older male anglers and groups of young men on private lakes.

Evidence: 17 boating deaths; three capsizes killed 7; no life jacket documented in 7 deaths. At Lake Norman, the sister in a life jacket survived; her brother, who went in after her, did not.

2 Teach "Reach, Throw, Don't Go" to families and teens

Bystander-rescue training should be part of every youth and family program: call 911, reach or throw something that floats, and enter the water only with a flotation device.

Evidence: at least three rescuer deaths, two of them siblings (ages 21 and 13) who saved a sister.

3 Reach 16–20-year-olds where they work and gather

Bring water-safety messaging to first jobs (agriculture, ranching, outdoor work), high-school seniors, college orientation and military recruits. Emphasize swimming ability limits, cold or murky water, and never swimming alone.

Evidence: teens were the only age group not to decline (11 vs. 10.6). Four 18-year-olds died in two Texas incidents.

4 Extend the backyard-pool season and close the pond gap

Keep layers-of-protection messaging (four-sided fencing, self-latching gates, door alarms, a designated Water Watcher) running through October in Sun Belt states. Ask property managers and HOAs to fence or barrier retention ponds next to homes and apartments.

Evidence: six under-5 deaths in home pools; two toddlers drowned in ponds near their homes, one in a Columbus apartment-complex retention pond, the area's second such death since July.

5 Add water-safety plans to school field trips and youth outings near water

Encourage districts to adopt written plans for any outing near water: supervision ratios, life jackets, swim-ability screening, and no wading or swimming without lifeguards.

Evidence: a teacher and student died during an Iowa field trip. Circumstances have not been released.

6 Include vehicle-submersion escape in public education

Teach "Seatbelt off, Window open, Children out, Get out" and support guardrails where roads run beside water.

Evidence: 5 deaths after vehicles entered water, including a grandmother and two young grandchildren in Maine.

SECTION 6 · ACTIONABLE ITEMS

What to do next

WHEN	ACTION	WHO
NOW	Share the September findings with state boating-safety offices in Texas, Florida, Oklahoma and Utah ahead of fall fishing, hunting and holiday boating.	Prevention coalitions, state partners
NOW	Run a "Reach, Throw, Don't Go" social campaign during October, using September's rescuer deaths as the anchor story.	NDPA members, swim schools
OCTOBER	Keep home-pool and retention-pond messaging live in Sun Belt states, where pools stay open into fall; reach property managers and HOAs about pond barriers.	Local coalitions, aquatic facilities
OCTOBER	Contact school districts about field-trip water-safety policies before spring trips are planned.	Education partners
NOV-DEC	Prepare cold-water and ice-safety messaging for northern states before first ice.	Northern-state coalitions
MID-OCT	Re-issue final September figures once late reports are in, and confirm outcomes for the 7 pending cases.	TAETI / The Drowning Report

METHODOLOGY AND DATA NOTES

Source. The Drowning Report is TAETI's national surveillance database of U.S. fatal drownings, compiled from news coverage, law-enforcement and coroner releases, and state and federal agency reports. Each record is matched to a source, and duplicates and non-fatal incidents are removed before publication. Counts reflect drownings identified through public reporting and will differ from CDC vital statistics.

This month. 110 September 2026 records were on file at 30 September after a month-end audit that removed duplicates and corrected incident dates. 103 are counted as confirmed deaths. 7 incidents where the victim was last reported hospitalized or critical are held out until a death is confirmed. Three deaths still pending a cause ruling are counted. The DATE field is the date the victim entered the water.

Comparisons. September 2026 is compared with September of each of the five prior years (2021–2025): raw mean 168.2, flood-excluded mean 160.2. Prior years are settled. September 2026 is preliminary, and late reports typically raise a month's count for one to two weeks after it closes. A final figure will follow in mid-October.

Circumstances. Contributing factors are recorded only where a source states them. Ethnicity is recorded only where a source states it and is not reported this month because coverage is too sparse.

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