



Water KIDZ

*Take care,
stay safe
around canals*



In South Africa, we make use of hundreds of kilometres of water canals to move water from its source to places where it is required. While the water in these canals can look extremely inviting, especially in the hot summer months, they can be dangerous, and people should steer well clear of them.

For the safety of all, swimming, fishing, playing and/or other recreational activities are not allowed in or around canals. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to keep people out. Most canals do not have protective barriers around them. It is very difficult to build a fence around a canal that is hundreds of kilometres long! Canals are usually full during the warmer months of the year when irrigation water is needed most. This is when they are at their most dangerous.

The majority of the country's open canal systems were designed

and constructed many years ago, and are located in remote, rural areas. However, today, as communities grow and encroach onto canal servitudes, many of these canals now form part of urban and suburban landscapes. This increases the risk of people and animals drowning in canals.

In 2017 alone, six people drowned in the Addo-Kirkwood irrigation canal in the Sundays River valley. The 300 km-long canal runs past the backyards of many communities who live near the banks of the Sundays River. Community livestock have also been swept away by the water.

Why are canals so dangerous? Canals contain water that is quick-moving. There are no obstructions in the waterway to slow it down, or to provide visual cues to how fast the water is moving. Fast-moving water in a narrow channel can knock a person off



Animals also have a way of finding their way into canals.

their feet. Even water that is only a few centimetres deep, if it is moving fast enough, can cause a person to lose their balance and carry them away. In addition, debris (trash and garbage) and other dangerous things can be found in canals.

Canals can have deep water. If a person cannot swim or if they are hurt, falling into deep water could prove fatal. In addition to swift currents, irrigation canals may have undertows and turbulence that could drag even a strong swimmer under water. Many canals have steep slopes and slippery walls, which make them difficult to climb out of. Canals also have grates, culverts, spillways and in-water energy dissipation devices, which people can get caught up in. Pipelines and sidegrates in canals can cause a suction effect that can trap a person underwater.

Dry canals are not safe either because there is no way to know when water may be released and a person may be trapped by a surge of water.

Drowning is not the only risk people take by swimming in canals. Irrigation water may contain high levels of contaminants. Often these contaminants are not visible to the naked eye. While swimming or playing in canal water it is possible to ingest faeces, pesticides, insecticides, and other toxins that may make us ill or even have fatal consequences.

Canals are not recreational areas. They contain deadly hazards – both visible and invisible. Have fun, stay cool and be safe this summer.

If you live near a canal it is best to keep the following in mind:

- Fast-moving water can knock you off your feet and carry you a long way, even if it is only a few centimetres deep!
- Swift undercurrents and turbulence can drag you under and keep you there, even if you are an excellent swimmer.
- The sides of a canal, whether concrete or dirt, are often steep and slippery, which makes them almost impossible to climb.
- Stay away from grates, culverts and spillways. They can also be hazardous.



Many canals may contain fast-running water, which raises the risk of drowning.

Sources

www.dws.ogv.za | www.kid.org | www.tid.org