

Keeping the community safe around irrigation channels

As temperatures rise across the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, locals are being urged to resist the temptation of cooling off in irrigation channels - a deceptively dangerous option that could turn deadly in seconds.

While they may look calm on the surface, irrigation channels are anything but safe for swimming. Strong currents, sudden water surges, hidden hazards, and fast-changing conditions make them incredibly hazardous.

Stewart Wood, a long-time Griffith local, knows just how quickly things can go wrong. He learned the hard way as a teenager back in the 1980s.

"I jumped into a channel that looked still enough," Stewart recalled. "But the flow was stronger than I expected, then I spotted a brown snake swimming toward me."

Things got even scarier when he found himself trapped in a whirlpool - with the snake.

"I couldn't get out at first. Luckily, I escaped without being bitten, but I've never swum in a channel again," he said. "We've got great swimming pools here in Griffith and across the region. I'll take a few ducks over a snake and a whirlpool any day."

Murrumbidgee Irrigation CEO, Philip Holliday, says stories like Stew's are a timely reminder of the dangers.

"Many of our channels are now automated - that means gates can open or close without warning, changing water flows instantly," Mr Holliday said. "This can create powerful suction, surges, or traps that are almost impossible to escape from, even for strong swimmers."

The message is clear: irrigation channels are not swimming pools. They are working infrastructure designed to deliver water — not for recreation.

"Just because it looks calm doesn't mean it's safe," Mr Holliday warned. "We urge everyone to choose safe, supervised places to swim this summer."

The following general swimming precautions could help save a life: don't swim in irrigation channels; avoid fast flowing water; beware of submerged objects; don't dive into water of unknown depth; know where young children are and never leave them unattended around water; and never swim alone.

Let's keep our community safe this summer — choose the pool, not the channel.

ENDS

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