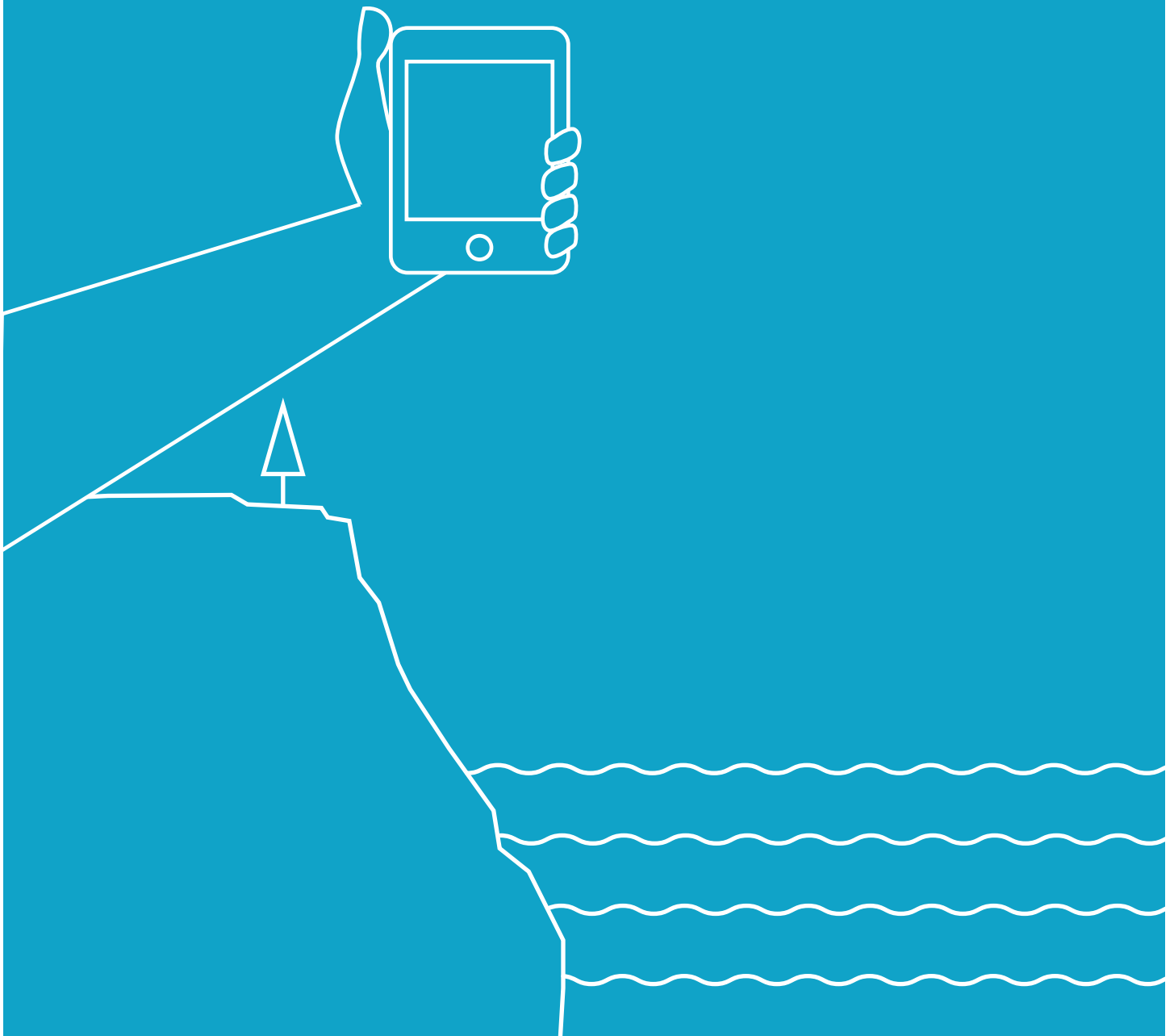


Living on the edge:

British Columbians taking more outdoor risks for social media glory



Report
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 **BC Hydro**
Power smart

Living on the edge: British Columbians taking more outdoor risks for social media glory

This summer, many British Columbians are heading out into the Great Outdoors for recreation—or for the perfect photo or video to impress their social media following. However, BC Hydro has recorded a concerning trend across the province with the rise of people trespassing or ignoring safety signage at its dams, reservoirs and recreation sites as well as near other electrical infrastructure like transmission lines and substations. In many cases, this risky behaviour is tied to wanting to get an impressive selfie, photo or video for social media.

Highlights

- New data from BC Hydro shows a concerning trend – over the past five years, BC Hydro has recorded a 200% increase in trespassing incidents at its dams, reservoirs and recreations sites.
 - This has been particularly evident in the summer months when the weather warms up—about three quarters of these incidents occurred during that time.
- And it's not just recreational sites – it has also seen a rise in public safety incidents involving transmission towers and other interference with its electrical system.
- The numbers do not paint the whole picture as most incidents go unreported.
- A new survey commissioned on behalf of BC Hydro, found the motivation for a lot of this risk-taking behavior could be tied to social media as nearly half of British Columbians have witnessed someone doing something risky outdoors to get the perfect photo, selfie or video.
- And while only about 15% admit to participating in this behaviour themselves, the evidence on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and other social media channels suggests the problem is likely more widespread.
- In fact, many adult British Columbians also admit to putting someone else in danger to get their desired shot.
- Pursuing the perfect photo or video for social media glory is most common among younger British Columbians, and men are twice as likely as women to engage in this type of behaviour.
- The most dangerous things British Columbians have done to achieve the 'perfect' shot include:
 - Standing at the edge of a cliff (16%),
 - Knowingly disobeying safety signage or trespassing (12%)
 - Taking a selfie from a dangerous height (9%).
- Sadly, this behaviour has resulted in some very serious injuries with about 2% or an estimated 80,000 adult British Columbians admitting to injuring themselves while trying to get a photo or video.
 - Cuts, falling and spraining ankles and knees are among the most common injuries followed by near drownings and broken bones.
- However, the risks do not stop at selfies, British Columbians also admit to staying in a park or recreation site after permitted hours (25%), getting too close to a wild animal (17%), cliff diving (15%), hiking in a or restricted area (13%) and swimming out of bounds or in a restricted area (12%).

Solutions

Selfie related deaths and injuries are on the rise globally. Between 2011 and 2017, 259 people were reported killed worldwide in selfie-related incidents.¹ Many of these incidents involved, water, electrical equipment or dangerous heights.

BC Hydro's top priority is public safety and recommends the following to stay safe near dams, reservoirs and electrical equipment:

- Stay clear of generating facilities including dams, powerhouses, power lines and all electrical equipment.
- Obey all warning signs and keep out of fenced, gated, and restricted areas.
- Never contact or climb transmission towers.
- Stay on designated trails and within observation areas, they are clearly marked.
- Stay well back from the edge of a waterway where footing may be slippery or the bank unstable.
- Listen and watch for sirens and strobe lights. These are warnings that water levels are changing.
- Stay outside of public safety booms and buoys.
- Keep in touch—if hiking or heading out on the water, do not go alone and let someone back home know where you are or use GPS if in range.

The great outdoors

Getting outside has been a refuge for many during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the arrival of summer, even more British Columbians are heading out into the Great Outdoors for recreation, with many documenting their outdoor adventures for social media. However, the pursuit of the perfect photo or video to impress their social media following is leading to unnecessary risk taking for many British Columbians.

In fact, BC Hydro data shows a concerning trend—over the past five years, BC Hydro has recorded a 200% increase in trespassing incidents at its dams, reservoirs and recreations sites. It has also seen an increase in members of the public interfering with electrical infrastructure, such as transmission towers and substations. And, nearly three-quarters of these incidents occur during the summer months.

A new survey commissioned on behalf of BC Hydro found the motivation for a lot of this risk taking behavior could be tied to social media, as nearly half of British Columbians have witnessed someone doing something risky outdoors to get the perfect photo, selfie or video.²

This report will explore why trespassing and risk-taking behaviour around BC Hydro infrastructure is on the rise, and the role that social media is believed to play in it.



Over 5 years data shows a 200% increase in trespassing at BC Hydro dams, reservoirs and recreation sites

¹ Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care

² Online survey conducted by Majid Khoury of 800 British Columbians from May 17-19, 2021.

Trading 'likes' for injuries

Mobile technology is more prevalent than ever before and it is estimated that almost 90% of Canadians over the age of 15 own a smartphone, with 45% admitting to checking their phone at least once every half hour.³ Increased smartphone use has also led to an increase in the use of social media applications such as Instagram, where videos and photos can be shared. Data from Statistics Canada shows 65% of Canadians ages 15–64 use social media to share content such as pictures and videos with family and friends, with a quarter sharing publicly.⁴

This need to share might be why getting the perfect shot can sometimes be an extreme sport—over half of British Columbians have witnessed risk-taking for social media. And while only about 15% admit to participating in this behavior themselves, the evidence on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and other social media channels suggests the problem is likely more widespread than these numbers suggest.

The most dangerous things British Columbians have admitted to doing to achieve the 'perfect' shot include standing at the edge of a cliff (16%), knowingly disobeying safety signage or trespassing (12%), and taking a selfie from a dangerous height (9%).

Sadly, the pursuit of the perfect shot has resulted in some serious injuries. About 2% or an estimated 80,000 adult British Columbians admit to injuring themselves while trying to get a photo or video, and many also admit to putting someone else in danger to get their desired shot. Cuts, falling and spraining ankles and knees are among the most common injuries caused by this type of behaviour, followed by near drownings and broken bones.

In extreme cases, deaths have even occurred around the world. From October 2011 to November 2017, there were 259 deaths worldwide while taking selfies. This prompted researchers at the US National Library of Medicine to recommend that 'no selfie zones' be introduced at dangerous areas such as bodies of water and mountain peaks to reduce risk. Many of these selfie deaths involved bodies of water or electrocution, which underscores the importance of avoiding BC Hydro infrastructure when pursuing the perfect shot.⁵

Risks taken for the perfect photo:



16% stood at edge of cliff



12% knowingly disobeyed signage or trespassed



9% took selfie from a dangerous height

Dam dangers

BC Hydro operates 31 generating stations across B.C. Many of its dam sites feature recreation areas with parks or beaches for members of the public to enjoy, and most of the time they are enjoyed safely. However, there can be many hazards near dams, generating stations, reservoirs and recreation sites caused by water flows, currents and electrical infrastructure, and incidents of risk-taking and accidental drowning tend to go up in the summer months when British Columbians get outside and, in the water, more.

That is why it is particularly concerning that over 600,000 British Columbians admit to knowingly trespassing or ignoring safety signage at parks and recreation sites across the province to take photos or video. Pursuing the perfect photo or video is most common amongst younger millennials—over 20% in the 18–34 age group said they have taken a risk for social media glory— and men (18%) are twice as likely as women (9%) to take a risk for a photo or video.

³ Statistics Canada

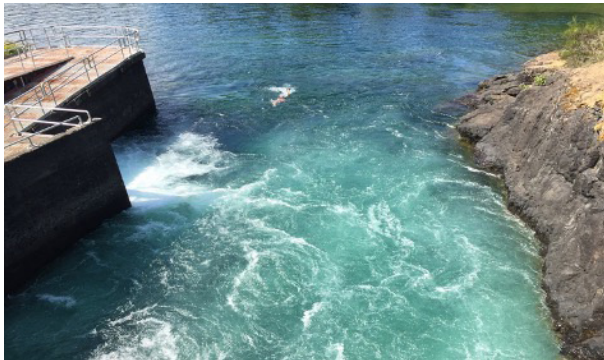
⁴ Statistics Canada – Canadians' assessment of social media in their lives

⁵ National Library of Medicine – Selfies: A boon or bane?

Dams and reservoirs are particularly dangerous places to take a risk for social media, as one of the most frequent causes of selfie-related deaths is drowning.⁶ BC Hydro has recorded dozens of safety incidents and near misses at or near its dams, generating stations, reservoirs and recreation sites over the past several years, and the numbers are likely much higher as most incidents go unreported if there is no injury or vandalism.

Most of these incidents involve members of the public engaging in ‘daredevil’ behaviour such as cliff jumping, swimming or boating out of bounds and ignoring safety signage and getting too close to active generating infrastructure—and often they document their activities for social media. For example, a daredevil trespassed at BC Hydro’s Buntzen Lake Dam, climbing the powerhouse and taking footage from dangerous heights to post for followers on his YouTube channel.

This type of behaviour is not uncommon, as 12% of British Columbians admit to going swimming out of bounds or in a restricted area at a reservoir or beach, and 7% said they have gone boating, canoeing or kayaking in a dangerous area—often taking photos or video of their ‘adventure.’ One example happened last year at Vancouver Island’s Comox dam, when a member of the public was observed swimming on the downstream side of the dam dangerously close to the spillway gates. At the time both spillway gates were open and passing water through them, which could have easily taken the swimmer under. Water levels and the speed the water is travelling above and below a dam can change rapidly and without warning, making swimmers vulnerable to currents, sudden temperature changes and drop points.



A swimmer swims in an unauthorized area at Comox Dam

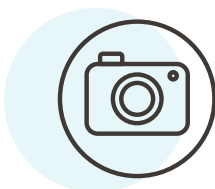


Courtesy of Fernie search and Rescue—Leap of Faith Falls in Elko

Similarly, in the Kootenays daredevil whitewater kayakers often plunge over the natural falls downstream of Aberfeldie and Elko Dams. About once a year, local Search and Rescue is called to rescue someone who has been injured going over the falls, including an incident last year that left one woman with a significant lower back injury. At Elko, kayakers sometimes even go over the spillway in their kayaks to get into the canyon between the dam and the powerhouse.

Other examples of risky behaviour near dam sites and generating stations include; members of the public trespassing at the Revelstoke dam, and coming dangerously close to electrical switchgear equipment, a group of teenagers jumping the fence to trespass at the Comox Dam spillway to get to the river, and members of the public walking along the top of the Puntledge Generating Station penstock—to name a few. In many of these cases, photos and videos were taken and later posted on social media.

Other risky behaviours:



- 25% have gone into a park or recreation area or stayed in one after hours
- 17% got too close to wild animal
- 15% have gone cliff diving
- 13% gone hiking in restricted area
- 12% have gone swimming out of bounds or in a restricted area

⁶ Media-based clinical research on selfie-related injuries and deaths

Dangers on land

In addition to dams and generating stations, BC Hydro's electric infrastructure also includes power lines, towers, poles and substations that help deliver the power to all of B.C.

In recent years, there has been an increase in incidents where members of the public trespass on or near this infrastructure or come too close to electrical equipment—in some cases to take photos or video for social media. For example, during the 2018 ice storm—the worst in BC Hydro history—a member of the public took a selfie very close to a downed transformer and high voltage line, risking severe injury and death.

There have also been dozens of reports of members of the public climbing transmission towers each year to take photos, and it is suspected that numbers are even higher as most incidents go unreported. For example, last year a large party was held under a transmission tower in North Vancouver, and revellers ended up climbing the tower, with some taking photos from dangerous heights. Similarly, Vancouver teenagers were regularly climbing a transmission tower to smoke on its platform. This finally stopped when BC Hydro installed an anti-climbing device and more signage.

Transmission lines carry large quantities of electricity from generating stations to cities and towns. The electricity is then transformed by substations so that it can be distributed to customers via distribution lines. Transmission line voltages vary from 60,000V to 500,000V and climbing a transmission pole or tower could result in a fatal injury. No picture is worth the danger.



A 'daredevil' trespassed at BC Hydro's Buntzen Lake Dam, climbing penstocks to post for followers on his YouTube channel.

Solutions

BC Hydro delivers reliable, clean energy to homes and businesses across British Columbia. It depends on its extensive transmission and distribution system to ensure the power gets to where it is needed. The power system is designed to be safe, but dangers exist, especially when members of the public get too close and put themselves in risky situations to take photos or videos.

BC Hydro recommends the following to stay safe near dams, reservoirs and electrical equipment:

Near hydroelectric facilities and reservoirs:

- Stay clear of generating facilities including dams, powerhouses, power lines and all electrical equipment.
- Obey all warning signs and keep out of fenced, gated, and restricted areas.
- Stay on designated trails and within observation areas, they are clearly marked.
- Stay well back from the edge of a waterway where footing may be slippery or the bank unstable.
- Listen and watch for sirens and strobe lights. These are warnings that water levels are changing.
- Stay outside of public safety booms and buoys.

Near all other electrical equipment:

- Never contact transmission towers, and do not under any circumstances climb these towers as they carry large quantities of electricity at a very high voltage.
- Stay out of substations. Only trained, authorized BC Hydro workers should ever enter a substation as the amount of high voltage electrical equipment could be deadly.
- Should you encounter a downed power line or other damaged electrical equipment, stay back 10 metres (33 meters from a transmission line) and call 911.

To report trespassing or a dangerous incident on or near BC Hydro equipment, call 911. For more information on how to stay safe around BC Hydro's electric infrastructure, visit [bchydro.com/safety](https://www.bchydro.com/safety).

