

HPD Warns Backyard Pool Drownings Happen "Quickly and Silently"

WASHINGTON, D.C. - According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in recent years an average of about 250 children under 5 years old drowned in pools nationwide annually. More than half of these deaths occurred in the summer months. Among unintentional injuries, drowning is the second leading cause of death to this age group after motor vehicle incidents. Another 2,700 children are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year for near-drowning incidents. Most of these cases involve residential pools.

"Most people assume if their young child falls into the pool, there will be lots of splashing and screaming, and plenty of time to react," said commission Chairman Hal Stratton. "In reality, a child slips into the water and often goes under the surface. These drownings can happen quickly and silently - without warning."

The key to preventing these tragedies is to have layers of protection. This includes placing barriers around your pool to prevent access, using alarms on doors that access the pool, and being prepared in case of an emergency.

Though it seems obvious, close supervision of young children is vital for families with a home pool - and not just when outside using the pool. A common scenario is that young children leave the house without a parent or caregiver realizing it. Children are drawn to water, not knowing the terrible danger pools can pose. Also, just because children know how to swim, doesn't mean they are drown-proof. All children should be supervised every second while in and around the pool.

The Police Department offers these additional tips to prevent drowning:

- Fences and walls should be at least 4 feet high and installed completely around the pool. Fence gates should be self-closing and self-latching. The latch should be out of a small child's reach. Keep furniture that could be used for climbing into the pool area away from fences.
- If your house forms one side of the barrier to the pool, then doors leading from the house to the pool should be protected with alarms that produce a sound when a door is unexpectedly opened.
- A power safety cover -- a motor-powered barrier that can be placed over the water area -- can be used when the pool is not in use.
- Keep rescue equipment by the pool and be sure a phone is poolside with emergency numbers posted. Knowing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can be a lifesaver.
- Don't leave pool toys and floats in the pool or pool area that may attract young children to the water.
- For above-ground pools, steps and ladders to the pool should be secured and locked, or removed when the pool is not in use.
- If a child is missing, always look in the pool first. Seconds count in preventing death or disability.
- Pool alarms can be used as an added precaution. Look for alarms that meet the requirements of the ASTM standard. The commission advises that consumers use