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Follow precautions to enjoy safe swimming

Parents should know pool safety

It's that time of year again when families head to the pools and beaches. It's also time to keep in mind some safety tips to protect the swimmers, divers and water lovers in your family.

Consider that drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death around the home to children under 5 years of age, according to Farmington Hills Fire Department officials.

More than 4,600 drownings and near-drownings are estimated to occur nationwide each year. An estimated 350 children under age 5 could drown this year in home swimming pools and spas when their parents or supervisors aren't looking.

Last year in Farmington Hills, a 2-year-old boy drowned in a swimming pool in his parents' back yard, according to a Farmington Hills fire report. The boy apparently climbed up the stairs to the pool and fell in.

"Drowning is a silent accident. There's rarely a splash or cry for help to alert parents to the problem. Too many times, parents believe that this tragedy could never happen to their family," fire chief Richard Marinucci said.

'We're concerned that anyone who dives knows how to dive safely.'

— Richard Marinucci
Hills fire chief

CONCERN OVER child drowning accidents and water safety has prompted the fire department to participate in "Operation Water Watch," which is a national effort to educate parents and pool and spa owners about ways to prevent drowning and diving accidents.

According to the National Spa and Pool Institute there are more than 6.5 million residential swimming pools and spas in the country. It's in these pools that children under 5 drown.

In most cases, the drowning victim is a 1-2-year-old boy who is not thought to be in the pool or spa area.

Parents and supervisors should be aware that children this age are constantly developing new interests and capabilities. A study of drowning and near-drowning incidents by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission shows that in most drownings or near-drownings, supervision of children lapsed momentarily.

Nearly 50 percent of the children were last seen inside the home. For this reason, a well-maintained barrier should be in place between the living area and the pool or spa.



Walter Stone, a swimming instructor at the Mercy Center, shows 5-year-olds Michael Cobb (left) and Sean Baldwin how to stay afloat. With warmer weather around the corner, Farmington Hills fire officials are urging safety and awareness for children around pools, hot tubs and spas.

PETER BALDWIN

EVERY POOL should, at a minimum, have a barrier completely surrounding it. The barrier should be a fence, wall or portion of a building wall. If the house is part of the barrier, the doors leading to the pool should be equipped with an exit alarm or should be self-closing and self-latching.

Parents and supervisors should maintain constant eye contact when children are in or near any body of water. In the time it takes to answer a single phone call, a child, if left alone, could be in great danger.

Never take your eyes off your child — even for a second — in or near a swimming pool, hot tub or spa. Also don't consider your children "drown-proof" be-

cause they have been enrolled in swimming classes. Don't rely on inflatable devices to keep your child afloat. They aren't substitutes for supervision, Marinucci said.

It's imperative, Marinucci said, that parents or others responsible for the children know how to administer life-saving techniques, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation. A telephone should be available at the pool as well as emergency phone numbers.

Diving safely is of equal concern as an estimated 500-700 recreational swimmers could be seriously injured diving into shallow areas of lakes, ponds, streams and swimming pools.

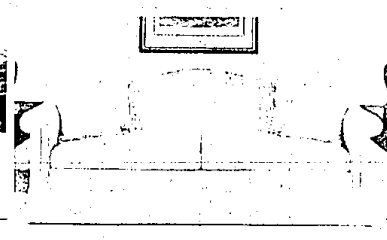
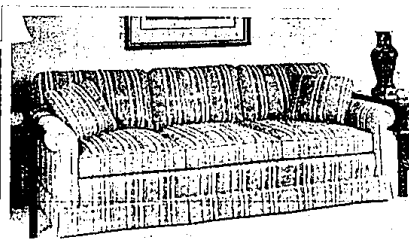
"We're concerned that anyone who dives knows how to dive safely, whether they're diving into a pool, lake, pond or river. Learning how to dive is just as important as learning how to swim. Both can be worth your life," Marinucci said.

Diving should always take place in the deep end of a pool where there is a clear diving path of at least 25 feet off the side of a diving board, slide or other pool equipment. Never try to dive through a inner tube or other pool toy.

Marinucci warns that no one should ever dive or slide head first into an above-ground pool because they aren't deep enough.

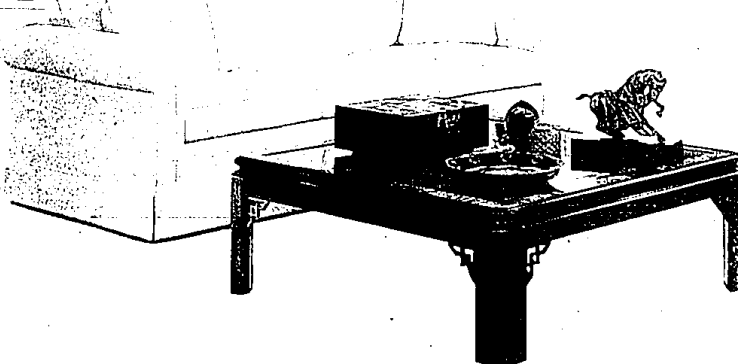
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