

Swimming pool accidents on rise

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission warns that almost 30,000 persons will require hospital emergency room treatment this year in accidents associated with some of the nation's four million swimming pools.

Residential in-ground pools now number about one million and home above-ground pools are estimated at three million, according to the National Swimming Pool Institute.

The institute also states there are about 340,300 in-ground pools in hotels, motels, apartments, parks and public facilities, schools, clubs and camps.

INJURY STATISTICS indicate that 39,500 persons annually will seek hospital emergency room care for injuries involving below-ground pools; about 10,000 will need treatment for injuries related to above-ground pools. Seventy-five per cent of the injured will in-

volve persons 19 and under, and almost twice as many boys as girls will be hurt.

The National Safety Council reports that 600 children and adults drown annually in swimming pools, 330 in home pools.

Swimming alone or without adult supervision leads to many drownings. Each year, headlines note the deaths of infants and children who tumble into pools and drown because a gate was left open or they otherwise were

able to gain access to a pool when no one was around to save them.

Many severe injuries result from falling on slippery walkways and decks and falling from diving boards and ladders. Diving and jumping into shallow water also are major causes of serious injuries.

Although many pool accidents are related to running and roughhousing, numerous injuries also are attributed to the pool, its accessories and general environment.

The severity of injuries associated with swimming pool water slides — permanent disabilities for some adults and children who went head first down the slide and struck the bottom of the pool — led to a commission decision in June to commence a proceeding to develop a mandatory safety standard for slides.

THE COMMISSION also is considering a variety of approaches that could reduce injuries associated with other pool hazards, such as sharp edges and protruding bolts, slippery ladders, decks and diving boards, lack of depth indicators, shock hazards from electrical wiring and problems of exploding filter tanks.

Commission staff recommend a number of precautionary measures consumers can take to reduce home pool hazards:

Check local ordinances and codes for safety requirements.

Use non-slip materials on the pool deck, diving board and ladders.

The steps of the pool ladder should be at least three inches wide, and the ladder should have handrails on both sides small enough for a child to grasp. There should be a ladder at both ends of the pool.

Electrical equipment should be installed by a licensed electrician in accordance with local safety codes. Ground-fault circuit interrupters are now recommended for pool area installations. Faulty electrical installations could cause serious or fatal electrical shock.

CHECK WITH a reputable pool contractor to be sure the depth is sufficient for a diving board or slide. Always put a slide in a deep area of the pool — never in shallow water. There should be a fence at least six

feet high around all sides of the pool with a locked gate to keep children out when there is no supervision and the fence should be constructed so it is difficult to climb.

Lawn furniture, trees and shrubs should not be close enough to provide an easy boost over the fence. Avoid using a side of the house as part of the fence. Toddlers have wandered out through an open patio door or window and drowned.

Mark water depths conspicuously. Use a safety float line where the bottom slope deepens.

ABOVE-GROUND POOLS: Install sturdy guard rails around the pool deck. Look for round rims on the metal shell to be sure the rims do not present a sharp cutting edge if someone falls. The access ladder to the deck should be sturdy and without protruding bolts or other sharp edges. The access ladder should swing up to prevent children from unauthorized entry or should be easily removable for secure storage away from the pool area.

Check the pool and equipment periodically for cleanliness and good maintenance. Cover all sharp edges and protruding bolts; repair rickety or broken ladders and railings. Replace non-slip materials when they wear out.

Obviously teach children to float or swim as soon as possible.

Always provide competent adult supervision when the pool is in use. Even adults should never swim alone.

Caution children against showing off and playing rough and explain the dangers of running and diving recklessly.

NEVER PUSH others into the pool. When using water slides, always go feet first.

Before diving or sliding, check to be

sure that other swimmers are out of the way.

Keep rescue devices and first aid supplies near the pool. A floating shepherd's crook is useful.

Teach children what to do in case of emergency. An alarm bell that could summon help would be a good idea.

Keep electrical appliances such as radios out of the pool area because of the hazard of electrical shock. Never swim after drinking alcoholic beverages, eating or taking medications.

To report pool hazards and pool-related injuries or for a copy of the swimming pool fact sheet, write: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207.

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