

Water: The Silent Danger

Rebecca Booker

Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department

Childhood drowning occurs quickly and silently, typically when a child is left unattended or during a brief lapse in supervision. A child will lose consciousness two minutes following submersion. Irreversible brain damage occurs after four to six minutes. Nationwide, 92% of children who survive are discovered within two minutes following submersion.

According to “The State of Home Safety in America” report, drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury among children age 14 and under and the leading cause among children ages 1-4. The majority of drowning occurs in residential swimming pools and open water. However, children may drown in as little as one inch of water. Therefore, children are even at risk around wading pools, bathtubs, buckets, toilets, and hot tubs. Typically, older children (5-14) are more likely to drown in open water sites, such as lakes, rivers and oceans.

Swimming Safety and Pool Security

- Fences around the pool are important in keeping children out. 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.
- Make sure safety rules are posted near the pool and children are familiar with them.
- Never swim alone; use the buddy system.
- Make swim lessons a priority.
- Always practice constant, adult supervision around any body of water, including pools and spas. Never leave children alone or in the care of another child.
- Stay out of the pool during severe weather and thunderstorms, especially if lightning is forecast or present.
- Keep all covers completely off while swimming.
- When hosting a pool party, assign specific adults to keep an eye on the pool at all times.
- Understand that alcohol is involved in about 25-50% of adolescent and adult deaths associated with water recreation.
- A pool safety cover installed can be locked when the pool is not in use.
- Keep rescue equipment, emergency numbers and a cell phone by the pool.
- Know cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), it can be a lifesaver. Call the City of Blaine to sign up for CPR @ 763-784-6700.
- 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.
- To prevent body entrapment and hair entrapment/entanglement, have a qualified pool professional inspect the drain suction fittings and covers on your pool and spa to be sure that they are the proper size, properly attached, and meet current safety standards. If your pool or spa has a single drain outlet, consider installing a safety vacuum release system that breaks the vacuum to avoid potential entrapment conditions. Make sure the children know not to play around these areas.

In-Home Water Safety

Water presents a serious hazard both inside and outside the home. Young children are especially vulnerable to drowning risk areas inside the home including toilets, bathtubs, and buckets. Constant supervision is the most effective way to keep children safe around water at home.

- Always supervise children around water. This includes buckets, bathtubs, toilets and spas.
- Never allow older siblings to supervise in or around standing water.
- Baby bath seats are not a safety device and should never substitute for adult supervision.
- Never leave standing water in a bathtub.
- Use toilet seat locks and keep toilet lids shut.
- Be sure all buckets are emptied and turned over immediately after use.

Safety in Waterways

- When boating, always wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD (personal flotation device). It is estimated that 85% of boating-related drowning could have been saved if the victim had been wearing a PFD. Air-filled "swimming aides" are not considered safety devices and are not a substitute for PFD's.
- Never leave a child unattended in and around water.
- Effective May 6, 2005, children under age 10 are required to wear a life jacket while boating on Minnesota waters (not when the boat is tied up at a dock or permanent mooring).

