

## **PLASTIC AND INFLATABLE POOLS CAUSE CONCERN**

By: Heather Danenhower

Patrick Asselin, a paramedic/firefighter with Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) and the father of two boys, ages seven and four, read a disturbing article in a Canadian newspaper regarding the drowning death of 13-year old girl in Quebec.

In a three-foot deep above-ground pool, similar to the one Asselin bought for his family several years ago, the young girl became trapped under water. An exposed vacuum pump attached to the filtration system sucked in the young girl's hair, pinning her under water.

While this specific scenario has not occurred in Marion County, the possibility exists. Every summer a child will inevitably wander into a pool left unsupervised.

To help prevent drowning deaths, the Florida legislature has imposed regulations on the construction and maintenance of swimming pools. These regulations span the gamut of pool safety and address issues such as self-latching mechanisms on gates and alarms on windows that overlook the pool area.

But most of the regulations govern only swimming pools that are deeper than two feet. And in other states, standards apply solely to in-ground pools. Fewer rules apply to shallow wading pools, small plastic or inflatable pools or above-ground pools. "A child can drown in less than two inches of water," said Asselin. "Infants and toddlers are top-heavy, which means they can't stabilize themselves, if they fall into a bucket, toilet or bathtub."

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, approximately 40 children drown in buckets annually in the United States. Another 1,300 have either drowned or suffered injuries in wading pools.

Inflatable pools are available, and they are cheap (models start at \$20). They've become very popular alternatives to expensive, high-maintenance in-ground swimming pools. And, with Florida's warm weather, Asselin encourages parents to practice tenants of pool safety.

"There is no substitute for constant adult supervision," he said. "Children playing near water should be monitored continuously. If you need to run an errand or make a phone call, find someone else to watch the kids." Inflatable safety devices should never replace supervision.

Pool owners should also inspect water quality regularly, checking for adequate circulation and chlorine content. Stagnant water, especially in Florida, is a breeding ground for bacteria, algae and mosquitoes.

Asselin also recommends using a pool cover. Even if a child knows not to use the pool without adult supervision, neighboring children may not.

"Owners of above-ground pools should know about their parts," said Asselin. "Owners should know how to turn off the power to dangerous components in a moment's notice." Generally, it's

a good idea to turn off all pumps while an above-ground pool is in use and to follow all of the manufacturer's directions.

Doing so may just save a life.

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