

The Swimming Pool is a Great Place to Beat the Summer Heat

Now that summer is here many people around Oklahoma are heading to the swimming pool to beat the heat. Families who live in homes that feature a swimming pool must take extra precautions to ensure the safety of everyone.

Of the estimated 350 pool, spa and hot tub drownings that occur in the United States every year, most victims were out of their parents' sight for less than five minutes. This just goes to show how quickly a tragedy can occur. Another 2,600 children under the age of 5 are treated in emergency rooms following submersion incidents. Nationally, drowning is the leading cause of death to children under the age of 5 and the number two cause of accidental death for children under the age of 14.

The main key in preventing a tragedy in your backyard is to have "layers" of protection, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission and Safe Kids USA. These layers include placing a barrier around the pool to prevent access, using pool alarms, closely supervising every child and being prepared in the event of an emergency.

All pool fences or walls should be at least four feet high and completely surround the pool. Gates in the fence or walls need to be self-closing and self-latching and out of the reach of small children.

Many pools come equipped with a power safety cover, which is a motor-powered barrier that is placed over the water area when the pool is not in use. Also, a pool or spa should be equipped with an anti-entrapment drain cover and safety vacuum release system to prevent children from being caught in the drain suction.

It's important for homeowners to keep safety equipment by the pool, along with a cordless phone with emergency numbers posted. Also, all homeowners who have a pool should take a class in CPR.

Another tip is to see the world through a child's eyes. Pool toys left in the water can be enticing to young children. For safety's sake, always remove all pool toys when the pool is not in use. The ladders in above ground pools also should be removed when no one is swimming.

If a child is missing, always look in the pool first. Mere seconds count in preventing death or brain damage. Keep in mind that children younger than 5 don't normally struggle or make noise when they fall in the water.

As an added precaution, pool alarms can be used. Underwater pool alarms generally perform better and can be used in conjunction with pool covers. Remote alarm receivers should be used so the alarm can be heard inside the house or in other places away from the pool area. Exterior doors leading to the pool area need to be equipped with alarms that produce a sound when a door is unexpectedly opened.

Parents also need to keep in mind that small kiddie or wading pools can be dangerous if children are not properly supervised. A child can drown in just an inch of water, so small pools require just as much caution as large pools. When not being used and supervised, empty water from kiddie pools and store out of reach.

While swimming lessons for young children are beneficial, it is important not to assume swimming lessons protect your child from drowning. Inflatable swimming toys like "water wings" or noodles also do not prevent drowning.

No matter how much money you spend on safety equipment, nothing can replace the watchful eye of a parent. A swimming pool can add so much fun and enjoyment to the summer months as long as safety is kept in mind. The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, or status as a veteran and is an equal opportunity employer. Information given herein is for educational purposes only. References made to commercial products or trade names are with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement is implied. Oklahoma State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, State and Local Governments Cooperating.