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Media Release

For immediate release



Drowning of Children Under Five Increases

Two minutes left alone is all it takes for a small child to drown. In the last five years 37 infant and preschool children have drowned in New Zealand.

Sadly 2007 saw a 55% increase in under five fatalities from 2006. 64% of these avoidable tragedies occurred in the home environment. Of those drownings around the home, nearly three quarters occurred in the home swimming pool. Of particular significance is that well over half of all home pool drowning deaths occurred in pools that were non compliant with national pool fencing legislation and standards.

Hospitalisation records shows that 24% of submersion related injuries in 2007 were those under the age of five. This places under fives as the highest and most represented age group within reported submersion incident data.

This data (drowning and hospitalisation) reinforces that the home in its broad sense presents the greatest 'risk' environment for children with the home swimming pool the most at 'risk' area. Research conducted in 2007 by the Injury Prevention Unit of Otago University identified 71% of home pools in New Zealand were compliant with the *Fencing of Swimming Pools Act 1987* (FOSPA), representing a substantial improvement from 43% in 1997. While this increase is of importance, concern still exists around the inconsistent adoption of NZS 8500:2006 – *Safety Barriers and Fences Around Swimming Pools, Spas and Hot Tubs (2006)*.

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) General Manager Matt Claridge comments "Since the writing of NZS 8500 Territorial Authorities have been slow, or in some cases failed to adopt the new standard. This has lead to the situation where significant inconsistencies exist around the country. NZS 8500 offers a far superior means to preventing the drowning of small children. It further tackles the confusion and inconsistent requirements within the FOSPA".

Claridge continues "The fact that small children continue to drown in home pools in New Zealand is a tragic waste of human life. Given the increasing number of home pools and evolving design concepts with housing it is vital that NZS 8500 is used as the benchmark for ensuring home pools comply with the FOSPA. Thankfully the Department of Building and Housing have gained cabinet approval to consult on the FOSPA with a forward thinking approach to rectifying a major legislative blight that puts lives of children at risk".



Water Safety New Zealand, PO Box 10126, The Terrace, Wellington 6143

Phone: +64 - 4 - 801-9600

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In addition to pool fencing the high proportion of under five incidents highlights that water, be it in the home, or the pool, has the ability to turn deadly, quickly. Sue Campbell National Child Safety Advisor from the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society states “drowning is a silent activity that only takes 5cm of water. As parents, supervisors and caregivers we need to maintain hand contact whilst bathing at bath time; and always supervise children near water, ALWAYS”.

WSNZ distributed over 400 *Safer Play with Water* kits to Early Childhood Centres around New Zealand during the first quarter of 2008. These kits include a number of activities to build awareness of water safety messages and issues within the early childhood setting. These resources are available for parents in the form of a *Be WaterWise Safety Checklist, Keep Kids Safe Near Water* flyer, and a series of educational resources. For more information or to order a resource online, please go to www.watersafety.org.nz.

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All New Zealand drowning data is sourced from DrownBase™, Water Safety New Zealand's national drowning database.

All hospitalisation data is provided by the New Zealand Health Information Service, a unit of the Ministry of Health.

For more information or interview contact

Matt Claridge
General Manager
Water Safety New Zealand
Phone: (04) 801 9600
Cell: (027) 478 1836
Email: matt@watersafety.org.nz

Sue Campbell
National Child Safety Advisor
Royal New Zealand Plunket Society
Phone: (03) 471 9286
Cell: (027) 244 4430
Email: Sue.Campbell@plunket.org.nz