



**SPASA NSW SWIMMING POOL SAFETY AWARENESS RESEARCH REPORT  
SUMMER 2009/2010**



## CONTENTS

1. Foreword
2. SPASA NSW Safety Survey 2009: survey findings
3. SPASA NSW pool safety recommendations

### **Disclaimer**

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## FOREWORD

During winter 2009, SPASA NSW conducted a survey of 100 NSW swimming pool owners to gauge levels of safety awareness in the lead up to the summer swimming season. Despite renewed pool safety campaigns by organisations such as Royal Life Saving, drownings remain the single most common cause of traumatic death in children under five years of age.

As the peak industry organisation for the swimming pool and spa industry, SPASA NSW recognises that it has an important role to play in minimising the safety risks associated with pool and spa ownership. We have recently entered into partnership agreements with St John NSW and Kidsafe NSW, and have been working closely with the NSW State Government on proposed changes to the 1992 Swimming Pools Act relating to pool fences, the authority of local councils and pool safety.

Our survey reveals that more needs to be done in this area and the findings will assist us in these efforts. For example, 43% of those pool owners surveyed never check their pool fences which is certainly a worrying statistic. The complete findings are included in this report along with SPASA NSW's latest vital pool safety recommendations.

Swimming pools and spas are a healthy and beautiful addition to any backyard environment. The safe and enjoyable use of swimming pools and spas is a priority of SPASA NSW and its members.

If you have called our office or completed our survey, we would like to thank you for your time. If you have any questions or feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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## SURVEY FINDINGS

- Despite annual public awareness campaigns and council guidelines that state pool fences should be regularly checked, 43% of swimming pool owners NEVER check their pool fences.
- Whilst the vast majority of NSW pool owners surveyed have a pool fence and self-closing latch around their swimming pool, only a small minority has implemented a second level of security - 4% of those surveyed have a pool alarm, and only 2% have a door or gate alarm.
- Of those who have children or grandchildren under the age of 5, thankfully 93% surveyed never allow them to swim unsupervised. Worryingly, 3% DO allow their young children to swim unsupervised, with 4% only sometimes.
- When it comes to ensuring that pool fences are always clear of climbable objects such as tables, chairs and pots, 79% of those surveyed always ensure this is the case. 19% admitted that this was only sometimes the case and 2% didn't know.
- 35% of pool owners did not know that drowning remains the single most common cause of traumatic death in children under five years of age. Thankfully, 88% of those surveyed did know that lack of adult supervision is the main factor in the majority (70%) of toddler drowning deaths in Australia.
- When it comes to CPR competency, NSW pool owners evidently take this issue seriously, with 79% of those surveyed 'somewhat competent' or 'very competent' in CPR / resuscitation techniques. 48% of NSW pool owners have already completed a CPR course, with 40% now interested in completing a course.
- For those people who doubt the benefit of CPR training – in particular those 12% who, according to our survey, are not interested in completing a CPR course – 13% of pool owners surveyed have found themselves in an emergency situation where they needed to use resuscitation skills.

## SPASA NSW POOL SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Supervision**

Accidents in and around a pool can occur very quickly with tragic consequences. Sadly, drowning is often silent and only takes a few minutes. When it comes to young children, constant adult supervision is paramount. Having an adult present while young children are playing in or around the backyard pool is crucial and young children should never be left alone, even for a short moment. If you need to leave the pool or water area, take your child with you.

### **Fence your pool**

The NSW Swimming Pools Act 1992 requires all swimming pools to be fenced (minimum 1.2 metres high) with gates that are self-closing and self-latching. However despite this regulation, drownings still occur where gates are either propped open or the locks and fence are in disrepair. It is important to note that it is pool owners who are responsible for making sure that pools comply with the Act.

Pool fencing should be checked at least once a year to ensure it is not climbable and is in good repair. Furthermore, furniture or other items such as BBQs or planters that children can climb on should never be left near a pool fence.

### **Be swim smart**

Making sure children are familiar with water is also one of the best investments parents can make when it comes to ensuring pool safety. Swimming lessons for babies, toddlers and children are widely available at swim schools throughout Australia. Six months is the most common starting age for baby swim classes. Ensuring children are confident in the water from an early age is not only an important safety step it's also great fun for all the family.

### **CPR signs and resuscitation**

The Swimming Pools Act also requires pool owners to display resuscitation charts around swimming pools in case of an emergency. SPASA NSW also strongly recommends that all pool owners complete a resuscitation course. A resuscitation course delivers essential CPR skills that should be updated annually.

### **Remove pool covers**

Pool covers are important to keep pool water clean, retain heat and prevent evaporation but pool covers should never be considered a substitute for a fence or proper supervision. Some pool covers give the illusion of being solid but could sag if walked upon, potentially trapping a child underneath. Pool covers should always be removed before letting children into the pool area.

### **Pool alarms and other aids**

Finally, there are a number of wireless pool alarms and other safety aids now available on the market that will detect someone entering the pool water and set off an alarm. There are even alarms that can be attached to a child's wrist that will also work in the same way. Whilst alarms and other aids may provide an additional level of security they should never be considered a substitute for adult supervision.

### **Additional safety considerations**

- Keep chemicals safely stored out of reach of children
- Alcohol and swimming don't mix. Never drink around water
- Keep glass and breakables away from the pool area
- Regularly check pool the pool area for potential hazards
- Place 'NO DIVING' signs near pools unless they have been specifically designed to allow safe diving
- Be aware that poorly designed pools and spas can create an entrapment hazard. Get a licensed pool builder to check your pool and spa to ensure safety
- Make sure all pool users are warned against sitting on, or covering, a drain or suction point as this can cause serious injury
- Never put your head under water when in a spa

### **Want more information?**

Consumers should call a licensed swimming pool builder or licensed pool technician if they require more detailed information relevant to their particular circumstances. SPASA NSW can also provide consumers with relevant information as well as assisting them locate an appropriate expert.



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