

Can a lack of domestic water trigger an imminent drowning disaster?

Dr David Szpilman¹

¹SOBRASA, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil

Poster Session 1, Poster Foyer, November 4, 2015, 9:00 AM - 5:15 PM

In 2012, drowning was responsible for 6.369 deaths (3,3/100.000 inhabitants) and was the second leading cause of death for children aged 1 to 9 years old, 49% occurring at home. Domestic aquatic environments, in and around the household, were responsible for 1,4% of all deaths and 56% of those occurred in children aged under 9 years old.

Although Brazil is known to have one of the largest water resources in the planet, the treatment for human use and the distribution of this water to where it is most needed has never been efficiently achieved. Population is used to the concept of having a water container and cistern to store water, but just enough to meet their daily needs.

Summer season in Brazil is known to be a rainy period but, the southeast region of Brazil, the most rich and populous area, has suffered a summer trough in 2015, the most sunny and torrid weather of the last 87 years. The lack of water for consumption was never assumed or informed by the government, despite the warnings of the scientific community since 2006. The result is that 80 million people are not getting enough water to meet their basic daily consumption and a new risky behavior is becoming prevalent. People, especially from low-income settings, started storing water in buckets, sinks, bathtubs, water-tanks, wells and other sorts of recipients.

This new behavior of storing water in and around house can trigger a disastrous increase in the number of drowning deaths, since the officials aren't communicating any warning or safety measures regarding how people should deal with this constraint and to prevent drowning in this circumstance.

Children, especially those under 5 years old, explore their homes to discover their world, learning how to move and walk and they are particularly curious and attracted by water. This combination of lack of experience to evaluate the risk and their curiosity about the water is the recipe for disaster – putting them at great risk of domestic drowning.

Parents need to be warned to the risks of this new behavior and the way to prevent them. Taking these elements in consideration SOBRASA has started a "drowning warning campaign" where messages were disseminated in 3 different ways adjusted to different domestic locations and especially targeting children under 5 years old through their parents. The message common to all is: Pay 100% attention to your child while bathing and near any water recipient; keeping them at an arm distance.

AT-HOME

Any bucket, basin, bathtub, small pool, water-tank and other water recipients should be covered or kept empty. Occlude the access to any water storage by closing doors and using fences with self-locking gates. Occlude the access to the outside

BACKYARD

Occlude the access to any pool, water storage, nearby stream and ponds, by closing doors, using fences and self-locking gates.

Keep any cistern, water tank, and other water recipient covered and fenced or empty.

Avoid toys and other attractive objects for children inside or near water.

The only safe flotation device is a LIFEJACKET – be careful!

Teach your child how to swim but understand that swimming is not drown-proof.

POOLS

Occlude the access to pools using fences and self-locking gates.

Suction – Avoid it – Provide ways to turn off the pump while using it and have an anti-hair drain.

In case of pool parties, elect one shift for each parent as the water safety keeper for children

If prevention fails, ought to learn for free how to act when a drowning happens at Sobrasa.

<http://www.sobrasa.org/curso-de-emergencias-aquaticas-10-h/>