

POOL + SAFE – a successful drowning prevention campaign in Brazil

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Rescue 9, Serendit, November 6, 2015, 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Background

In 2012, drowning was responsible for 6.369 deaths (3,5/100.000 inhabitants) in Brazil and was the second leading cause of death among children aged 1-9 years old. When considering all age groups together, pools and bathtubs were locations of limited relevance for drowning deaths, representing only 2,6% of all deaths by drowning (n=167 in 2012) but for children aged 1-9 years-old, 53% of deaths occurred in these venues and specially at residences (49% from all). Brazil has an estimated 1,7 million ground pools with an associated estimated risk of 1 death per 639 pools per year, considering 20 years as lifetime of a pool. With that in mind, SOBRASA developed and launched a strategic prevention campaign to reduce pools and bathtubs drownings.

Method

Drowning experts were invited to select all pool and bathtub water-safety messages and actions. They were provided with all the information on the subject. Delphi method was applied in 3-rounds. 12 experts voluntarily participated and identified safety messages scoring them from 1-5. All messages ranking 4-5 were considered the most important water-safety messages to disclose to people through the POOL+SAFE campaign.

Result

The POOL+SAFE alliance was created involving 18 governmental and non-profit organizations: health-related, swimming federations, pool manufacturers, Fire Departments, Physical Education Councils, children safety institutes and Portuguese Lifesaving organizations. The result was a campaign based on 5 water safety messages with an impacting motto:

"POOL+SAFE campaign draws your attention to 5 steps that may change the future of our children by increasing the safety of your pool. By simply using the word "POOLS" you can easily recall how to vaccinate your pool against drowning, giving 95% of protection to your child with one shot.

Pay 100% attention to your child; be at an arm distance, even when a lifeguard is on duty.

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

Ought to learn how to act when a drowning happens.

Lifeguard on duty: all the time at collective pools. (*)

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

(*) At residencies no lifeguards need."

The image of POOL+SAFE is an open hand with each finger pointing to a message, with an additional encouragement "learn to swim" depicted on the palm. A webpage was created to host all the information. The goal was to instruct owners/managers and swimming teachers across 34 pool clubs and gyms on 8 Brazilian states, reaching more than 34.000 children. At <http://www.sobrasa.org/piscinamaissegura/> there's information for 2 stakeholder groups (free and entirely online): the owners/managers were able to learn how to increase pool safety using fences, self-locking gates, and safety drain systems, as well as the need of a lifeguard on duty, and signalization to the law that forbidding the presence of children under-10 without adult supervision; the swimming teachers could take a course on aquatic emergencies (drowning chain of survival: 5hours) and another on how to communicate water-safety messages to the children. Many tools as cartoon video, comic book, mouse pad, stickers, flyers, banners, T-shirts, refrigerator magnet, quiz, and animation, were used to increase the impact of the campaign.

Conclusion

A decrease of 39% in drowning deaths was observed in Brazil from 1979-2012. Still, the socio-economic burden of each drowning is large highlighting the importance of prevention as a key approach to the problem. In 2007, SOBRASA has called for more attention to this problem submitting a proposal to regulate a national law to improve safety at pools but yet not approved. We believe that a national preventive campaign like POOL+SAFE is the hallmark to reduce drowning in pools and increase awareness of the problem.