Wrong Kind of Pool Drain Covers Can Result in Death by Suction

Use of flat covers on pool drains allows for suction force strong enough to suction and hold swimmers at the bottom of the pool. Yet thousands of public pools, clubs and hotels have not yet replaced the covers.

Keywords

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CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

Transcript
Wrong Kind of Pool Drain Covers Can Result in Death by Suction
LISA MYERS reporting:
For children, pool drains are a natural curiosity but can be deadly. Drains can pack up to 800 pounds of suction force. A child's hair or body can be sucked in and trapped underwater. Watch what happened when we put this rubber toy on a drain. Three adult men could not pull it off.
Mr. ALAN KORN (Safe Kids USA): I've been doing injury prevention for close to 15 years, and these stories are about as tragic and horrific as I've ever heard.
MYERS: Six-year-old Abigail Taylor fell on the kiddie pool drain at her family's club. Its suction pulled out her intestines and she later died.
Offscreen Voice: (From home video) Graeme, where are you today?
MYERS: Seven-year-old Graeme Baker, granddaughter of former Secretary of State James Baker, was playing in a spa like this. Her mother, Nancy, says she became trapped by a drain's suction and drowned.
Ms. NANCY BAKER: And it pinned her. She couldn't--she couldn't get up.
MYERS: That tragedy and five years of tireless lobbying by the Baker family gave birth to a new law. It mandated that all public pools, basically any pool outside a private home, replace these flat drain covers with new safer covers by the end of 2008.
MYERS: So the suction on this one is less powerful.
Mr. KORN: That's right.
MYERS: But an NBC News investigation found that six months after the new law took effect, these potentially dangerous drains are still being used in thousands of pools from coast to coast. We found them at family resorts like these in south Florida, and at three different hotel chains in Southern California. In fact, of the 14 pools we checked in four states, half still had the flat, illegal drains. In the case of public pools or hotel pools which aren't compliant, should they be closed down?
Ms. BAKER: Absolutely.

MYERS: Health departments across the country gave us similar numbers. In Denver and Indianapolis, roughly 50 percent of pools still use the illegal drains. In some counties in Florida it's 70 percent. And in Los Angeles County, a whopping 90 percent.

Ms. INEZ TENENBAUM (Chair, Consumer Product Safety Commission): That is absolutely not acceptable.

MYERS: We shared our findings with Inez Tenenbaum, the newly appointed chair of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is charged with enforcing the law.

If the pools have not made the safety fix, are you prepared to shut them down?

Ms. TENENBAUM: We are.

MYERS: So far, the CPSC has told states that noncompliant pools should not be opened. But an official says the agency has not yet shut down any pools. Safety officials urge families to ask if the drains are compliant before taking a swim. Lisa Myers, NBC News, Washington.