

## **POOL FENCING**

### *Statement by Minister for Health*

**MR KUCERA** (Yokine - Minister for Health) [2.08 pm]: I inform the House of a report emanating from research into the adequacy of inspections of barriers to private swimming pools in Western Australia titled "Research Project on the Adequacy of Inspections of Barriers to Private Swimming Pools". The research was undertaken on behalf of the Department of Health and the Department of Local Government and Regional Development by the Injury Research Centre at the Department of Public Health at the University of Western Australia. This has been an exhaustive study involving a review of all coronial records of children who drowned in the period 1988 to 2000. In addition, the swimming pool barriers inspection process undertaken by local governments was subject to assessment.

The research shows that over the 12-year observational period from 1988 to 2000, a total of 50 children younger than five years of age drowned in private swimming pools in Western Australia. There is no distinct trend in the incidence of drowning in private swimming pools over the study period. The incidence of drowning remained stable at approximately 2.15 cases per 100 000 children a year for most of the period.

Examination of the coronial information shows that approximately half of the drowning events occurred at the household at which the child was resident, and that 96 per cent of the drownings could have been prevented with close supervision. Another very important factor contributing to the drowning events was that the child was able to gain unintended access to the pool in 80 per cent of the drowning cases. Such access occurred because there was no barrier between the house and the pool in half the cases, and in the other half the gate was either propped open or was malfunctioning. The study determined that compared with a pool that is protected by an isolation fence, there is an almost two-fold risk of a child drowning in a pool that has a non-isolation fence. Unfortunately, insufficient data was available for the study to determine the value difference between the self-closing, self-latching barriers that have been required as the minimum barrier since 1992, and the isolation fence.

I draw to the attention of members the results relating to the swimming pool barriers inspection process. As members are aware, the inspection of swimming pool fencing by local governments has been mandatory since the introduction of legislation in 1992. The inspections have been highly successful in achieving swimming pool compliance. When first inspected, only 45 per cent of pools met barrier compliance. When inspected a second time, generally four years later, 57 per cent of pools had barriers that complied with the legislation. The statistics show that pools that have been inspected three times have a compliance rate of 71 per cent.

In the absence of inspections, the level of compliance is expected to be low. This finding is supported by the results from the random survey of swimming pool owners, which revealed that over one-quarter of swimming pool owners were not aware of the legislation. The most frequently reported reason for non-compliance at the first inspection - 24 per cent - was that the access gate to the swimming pool was not self-closing and self-latching. The same reason became much more significant at the second inspection - 71 per cent - indicating that the first inspection had eliminated many of the basic structural issues associated with the barriers. Again, this demonstrates the value of local government inspections.

Mr Speaker, I table the report and invite members to familiarise themselves with its content.

[See paper No 1288.]