



HASTINGS PRINCE EDWARD
Public Health

Executive Summary

Backyard Pool Safety



Situational Assessment Results

June 2016

Introduction

Currently in Canada, drowning is the second leading cause of death amongst children 14 years of age and under.¹ For children under 5 years of age, private backyard pools present the greatest danger and account for 49% of water-related deaths in this age group.²

Within Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (HPECs), there are three municipalities without fencing by-laws in place. The remaining municipalities have fencing by-laws in place that usually only require three-sided fencing. Best practice suggests that four-sided-pool-fencing is the safest for the prevention of drowning and thus should be explored as a by-law option for municipalities within HPECs.³ As such, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health sought to assess the community readiness and awareness for this type of personal and municipal risk management tool to prevent drowning in children age 1-4 years.

The goal of this report is to help policy makers make an informed decision on how to prevent drowning in backyard pools, thus meeting the Board of Health Outcomes stipulated in the Ontario Public Health Standards for the Prevention of Injury and Substance Misuse which states that:

“Policy-makers have the information required to enable them to amend current policies or develop new policies that would have an impact on the prevention of injury and substance misuse” (p33).⁴

The methods used to conduct the situational assessment included key informant interviews with municipal Chief Building Officers and managers/owners of local pool retailers, and an online survey to engage residents of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties. An awareness campaign was also implemented alongside the situational assessment.

Key Findings from Interviews with Chief Building Officials

- Those municipalities with existing bylaws had similar processes for enforcing their bylaws. Residents were responsible for contacting their municipality and obtaining a permit. After the initial installation and inspection, enforcement was on a complaint basis only. One municipality required a refundable deposit to encourage residents to schedule a final inspection, thus mitigating that municipality’s liability.
- Most municipalities did not provide educational material to prospective pool owners but were willing to share such information from other organizations if provided.
- The average number of pool permits issued per year ranged area to area from zero to twenty.
- Municipal staff of municipalities with existing pool fencing bylaws felt that if their councils decided to make any changes to their bylaws that it would not impact their work significantly. For municipalities without existing pool fencing bylaws, there were concerns for liability and having the capacity to add that responsibility to their role.
- Many municipalities raised concerns regarding inexpensive seasonal pools and the need to increase residents’ awareness that these types of pools create a drowning hazard and also require fencing.

¹ (Natalie L. Yanchar, 2012)

² (Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, 2011)

³ (Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, 2011), (Safe Kids Canada, 2007)

⁴ (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2008, Revised 2015)

Key Findings from Interviews with Pool Retailers

- All pool retailers directed prospective pool owners to check with their municipality regarding their respective pool fencing bylaws
- These retailers installed a variety of pools including above-ground, on-ground, and in-ground and the estimated annual average number of pools installed amongst four of the six retailers is 60-80 pools per year.
- Pool retailers often mentioned other safety products (e.g., pool alarms and wrist-band alarm systems) that could be used alongside or instead of four-sided-pool-fencing.
- One retailer expressed concern that any increased costs of pool ownership would result in fewer pool sales.
- Newer subdivision lots tend to be much smaller and create challenges for pool installation and the incorporation of four-sided-pool-fencing.

Key Finding from the Community Survey

- Among respondents, 36% lived in Belleville, 37% lived in Quinte West, and 27% lived in the various rural areas of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties.
- 113 (30%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “A fence should completely enclose the pool on all four sides with no direct access from the house.”
- A slightly higher proportion of respondents (40%) supported a bylaw requiring four-sided-pool-fencing around pools that are 2 feet deep or deeper.
- Those who agreed or strongly agreed with four-sided-pool-fencing statement in question one were also more likely to support a bylaw (92%), while those who disagreed or strongly disagreed mostly did not support a bylaw (82%).
- Rural residents were more likely to agree with four-sided-pool-fencing than urban residents; 35% of rural residents (n= 101) versus 28% of urban residents (n= 275) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “A fence should completely enclose the pool on all four sides with no direct access from the house.”
- Whether or not respondents had children age 0-14 years in the home did not make a difference in respondents’ opinion regarding fencing and pool fencing bylaws.
- Whether or not respondents owned pools did make a significant difference in how respondents answered the survey. Those who already owned a pool 2 feet deep or deeper were more likely to disagree with four-sided-pool-fencing; 69% of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with four-sided-pool-fencing (n=267) answered yes to having a pool deeper than 2 feet.

Themes from respondent’s who agreed or strongly agreed with four-sided-pool-fencing

Amongst the respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “A fence should completely enclose the pool on all four sides with no direct access from the house,” the following themes emerged from the comments:

- There is existing support for four-sided-pool-fencing
- Fencing requirements for above-ground pools should be different from in-ground pools
- It is the pool owner’s responsibility to prevent neighbourhood children from accessing their pool
- It is normal for a municipality to have a pool fencing bylaw
- There are environmental and educational factors that prevent or mitigate drowning in young children

Themes from respondent’s who disagreed or strongly disagreed with four-sided-pool-fencing

Amongst the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “A fence should completely enclose the pool on all four sides with no direct access from the house,” the following themes emerged from the comments:

- There is existing support for four-sided-pool-fencing
- Fencing requirements for above-ground pools should be different from in-ground pools
- It is the pool owner’s responsibility to prevent neighbourhood children from accessing their pool
- Adult supervision plays an important role in preventing drowning, along with education, understanding child development, and other environmental factors
- Having access to affordable recreation such as swimming is important

Recommendations

The results of this assessment indicated there is a reasonable risk of drowning in backyard pools in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties due to insufficient backyard pool barriers. The factors that lead to drowning are complex, therefore prevention strategies need to be comprehensive. This assessment clearly shows support for three-sided-pool-fencing and also shows there is existing support for four-sided-pool-fencing. The recommendations for the development of a comprehensive drowning prevention strategy for children age 1-4 years in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties include the following:

- **Focus on the Following Themes for Future Educational Campaigns to Prevent Drowning in Children Age 1-4 Years:**
 - Defining What Active Supervision Looks Like
 - Recognizing Potential Drowning Hazards and the Need for Appropriate Supervision
 - Knowing How to Recognize the Signs of Drowning
 - Addressing a False Sense of Security That Swimming Lessons May Provide
 - Four-Sided-Pool-Fencing is the Most Effective Passive Strategy to Prevent Drowning in Young Children
- **Adopt Four-Sided-Pool-Fencing Bylaws**
- **Include Equitable Access to Swimming Lessons within Municipal Planning Processes**
- **Collaborate With Appropriate Agencies to Implement Drowning Prevention Strategies**

Conclusion

This report provides insight into the readiness of residents within Hastings and Prince Edward Counties for accepting safer pool fencing bylaws and it appears there is support for the development of a comprehensive drowning prevention strategy which includes safer pool fencing, continuing efforts to raise awareness of the importance of preventing drowning, and ensuring equitable access to developing swimming and water safety skills.