

Florida Is On Top Of Pool Safety

By DAN JOHNSON Special to the Tribune

Originally published in The Tampa Tribune on April 28, 2008

Your editorial "Lawmakers, Crist Must Plug Holes In Pool Safety Requirements" (Our Opinion, April 21) is misguided - dangerously misguided.

It states, "Drowning deaths are a certainty if lawmakers don't intervene." The opposite is actually closer to the truth - if the lawmakers would leave the language in the Uniform Florida Building Code alone, drowning deaths will be averted. New pools built and maintained in accordance with the Florida Building Code will completely eliminate the entrapment hazard.

The editorial states that the Florida Building Commission dropped the requirement for anti-entrapment devices on new pools. They did drop the requirement for new pools, but the anti-entrapment devices you refer to in your editorial are actually included in the language adopted by the FBC at the appropriate place in the code.

These devices and systems protect against swimmers becoming trapped by suction force on a bottom drain. The code includes them for use in the "existing pools, single drain" section, where they are effective, not on pools with dual drains or no drains as allowed by the code for new construction.

I note that you mentioned 150 deaths and injuries from 1990 to 2003. Not mentioned was that not one of those injuries or deaths occurred on a pool that was built and maintained in accordance with code - not one.

Another thing your editorial didn't say was that these devices only protect against body entrapment. The article mentions disembowelment, a tragic event, but fails to mention that these devices and/or systems do nothing to protect against this hazard. Nor do they protect against hair entanglement in drain covers - the leading cause of entrapment.

In fact, they only protect against body entrapment while the code language adopted by the Florida Building Commission protects against all five known hazards.

What the FBC did was adopt the American National Standards Institute ANSI-7 Suction Entrapment Avoidance in Swimming Pools, Wading Pools, Spas, Hot Tubs, and Catch Basins into the Florida Uniform Building Code. This standard is the most heavily researched, scientifically validated swimming pool safety standard ever produced and it addresses all five hazards.

The language in the ANSI-7 Standard is the foundation upon which the "Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act" was constructed by Congress and signed into federal law Dec. 19, 2007.

The single most effective method of protection is having an approved safety cover in place on all drains, but the bill currently before the House does nothing to require safety drain

covers on residential pools, nor does it require retrofitting existing single-drain pools, where these devices might have an effect.

Your editorial was not sufficiently researched. It urged application of the right solution to the wrong problem, like mandating seat belts for motorcycles.

Suction entrapment is a serious problem which can be completely eliminated when the right solution is applied, and that solution is the language adopted by the Florida Building Commission. The group spent two years investigating solutions before adopting it. The Legislature would do well to trust them.

Dan Johnson is a member of the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals' technical committee.