

## Drowned boy's arm was stuck in intake valve

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# Experts: Keep an eye on drains

By Martin B. Cassidy

Staff Writer

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The drowning death of a 6-year-old Greenwich boy this weekend when his arm became trapped inside an unprotected suction valve has drawn nationwide attention to the life-threatening hazard of pool and spa drains.

The death of Zachary Archer Cohn, along with a late June accident in which 6-year-old Abigail Taylor of Minnesota was disemboweled by suction from an uncovered wading pool drain, has raised questions in a debate over the best way to prevent pool and spa drain hazards.

"This is a terrible tragedy and as an organization we're going to focus on educating people about the risks of drain-entrapment," said Bob Cordes, managing director of Fairfield County Safe Kids.

Prompted by Zachary's death, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission yesterday released an updated list of the top five household hazards, including pool and spa drain entrapment for the first time.

Between 1990 and 2005 the agency recorded 130 people trapped by the suction of pool and spa drains, resulting in 27 deaths.

On Saturday Zachary's arm became stuck in an intake valve whose protective grate covering was later found in the pool, according to Lt. Daniel Allen, a spokesman for the police department. When bystanders realized Zachary was trapped, they shut down the pump by cutting the power to the house and freed the boy, Allen said.

Paul Pennington, president of the Santa Rosa, Calif.-based Pool Safety Consortium, said that a pool drain can produce more than 500 pounds of suction, enough to trap children and even adults.

"It's more suction than a child can escape from," said Pennington, who is also a

partner in a company manufacturing a drain safety device. "Four adults could not pull a person off if they've gotten stuck on a drain."

According to Safe Kids USA, a national child-safety education organization, more than 66 percent of parents are unaware of the risks of pool and spa drains.

Pool product businesses and builders said there are a range of options and equipment to reduce the danger of entrapment.

In Connecticut, newly built pools must have a dual drain system, to cut the suction by splitting it between two drains, according to Marcia Phelps, manager of Clearwater Pool Service Inc. in Stamford. Other devices include specially designed drain covers which dissipate suction force and a sensor device which shuts off a pump if a limb or other object is sucked into a valve.

A permit for the swimming pool at the Cohn residence was issued in 2005. Information about the pool's design and equipment was not available.

John Romano, president of the All-American Custom Pool Co. in Norwalk, said he helped draft recommended standards for the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals on anti-entrapment measures for swimming pools.

"This is kind of a call to action to our industry to take a look at pools where there are circumstances that could cause this to happen," Romano said. "I encourage people to get their pools inspected to assure they are safe."

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