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FOUR-SIDED POOL FENCING ENCLOSURE

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends that:

- 1. Recommendation No. 1 be amended to reflect that the Medical Officer of Health circulate this report to the area municipalities and that the letter contain additional clarification and explanation to assist the area municipalities with their review.**
- 2. The balance of the report, August 25, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services be adopted.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to area municipalities for review to determine whether their pool fencing bylaws should be amended.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an overview of the importance of safer pool fencing and recommends York Region municipalities consider adopting safer pool fencing by-laws.

3. BACKGROUND

Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related death for Canadian children ages 1 to 4 years old, almost half of these occur in inadequately fenced backyard swimming pools

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for young Canadians. Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related death for Canadian children ages 1 to 4 years old. Canadian Red Cross Society (2006) reported 368 drownings for this age group in Canada from 1991 to 2000. Almost half of all drownings occur in inadequately fenced single-unit home swimming pools. Children ages 1 to 4 years old account for the highest percentage of drownings in backyard pools and hospitalization for near drownings among all age groups. Most of these drowning incidents occur when children were playing or walking near water during a momentary lapse in adult supervision.

Any drowning or near-drowning incident is devastating

The annual costs for drowning for all ages in Canada have been estimated at over \$250 million, based on data from Safe Kids Canada and Canadian Red Cross in 2006. There are also significant indirect costs associated with both drowning and near-drowning. Some children suffer severe neurological impairments following a near-drowning incident and often require ongoing specialized care. The emotional and financial burden for the individual and family can be enormous.

In York Region, the incidents of swimming pool-related drowning and near drowning are low. Although the rate of pool drowning of young children in Canada is decreasing and pool drownings are not numerous in York Region, any drowning or near-drowning incident is devastating to a family and community from such preventable tragedy. Adequate preventative measures in a built environment can reduce avoidable child drowning and near-drowning.

Four-sided pool fencing could prevent 7 out of 10 drowning incidents in home swimming pools for children under the age of five

A retrospective Australian study found that children (younger than five years) who lived or visited a house with three-sided fencing were almost twice as likely to drown compared with children who lived or visited households with four-sided fencing surrounding their pools. Of the drownings that occurred in four-sided fencing pools, all were the result of either a pool gate being propped open or a fault with the self-closing/self-latching mechanism of the pool gate.

With the introduction of four-sided pool fencing legislation in New Zealand, the unintentional child drowning incidents declined more than 50% over a 20-year period. Evidence from a number of systematic reviews conducted in Canada and the United States also indicated that four-sided pool fencing is the best strategy for reducing the drowning risk for young children in home swimming pools, it is estimated that four-sided pool fencing could prevent 7 out of 10 such drowning incidents.

National survey found 81% of Canadian parents support changing pool fencing laws

A national survey conducted by Decima Research and Safe Kids Canada, a national injury prevention program of the Hospital for Sick Children, found that 81% of Canadian parents would approve changing laws to make four-sided fencing around home swimming pools mandatory.

Safe Kids Canada is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network in 16 countries around the world dedicated to preventing unintentional injury to children. Their work is

guided by their National Expert Advisory Committee to ensure evidence-based research is turned into best practices.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Safe Kids Canada recommends four-sided pool fencing for all above and in-ground pools over a depth of 0.6 metres

Safe Kids Canada has been advocating for safer pool fencing and legislative enforcements. It recognizes that although three-sided fencing has been shown to reduce drownings due to trespassing, it is not effective in protecting children who live in or are visiting a home in which they may gain access to the pool directly from the house. It recommends that pool fencing by-law should require four-sided fencing at a minimum height of 1.2 m (4 ft), with self-closing and self-latching gate that completely separate the pool from the house for all types of pools with a depth of over 0.6 m (2 ft). The pool enclosure should also be constructed of material and design that inhibits climbing.

The current pool fencing standards in the nine York Region municipalities do not meet the pool enclosure safety standards recommended by Safe Kids Canada

Current York Region municipal standards specify three-sided fencing and allow the residential building to serve as the fourth side. Most neighbouring municipalities of the Region have similar by-laws. Ontario municipalities that have passed a by-law requiring four-sided pool fencing include Wellington North, Montague, Brockton, North Perth and Toronto. The public health units of Middlesex-London, Ottawa and Halton Region are considering proposals for changes to pool enclosure by-laws in their municipalities to include four-sided pool fencing.

Municipal governments are well positioned to prevent swimming pool related deaths and injuries through passive measures such as enacting four-sided isolation pool fencing by-laws.

Additional costs to homeowners would correlate to the addition of one side of fencing, estimated at between \$300 to \$500 depending on the material and length of fence and not including any additional municipal charges.

York Region Public Health Branch continues its role through education, media campaigns and policy advocacy

The York Region Public Health Branch is mandated by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to collaborate with community partners to promote child health and prevent unintentional childhood injuries through education, media campaigns as well as policy

advocacy and development. Public Health staff will continue to promote water safety practices among York Region residents and be available to provide assistance to area municipalities in evaluating possible amendments to their current bylaws in backyard pool fencing.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the Region in recommending all York Region municipalities adopt safer pool fencing by-laws. The health promotion and consultation activities by York Region Public Health staff are components of their routine responsibilities and are accommodated within the current budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Over the last decade, all York Region area municipalities have passed laws requiring the fencing of private and public pools. This report recommends area municipalities review and consider amendments to their current bylaws to adopt safer pool fencing by-laws.

7. CONCLUSION

This report outlines the importance of four-sided pool fencing as an effective injury prevention strategy to reduce and prevent drowning deaths and near drowning incidents in York Region. Protecting the lives of children should outweigh additional fencing costs and aesthetic considerations. It is recommended that municipalities consider adopting safer pool fencing by-laws. York Region's Community and Health Services Department's Public Health Branch staff are available to provide consultation and resources including draft bylaws.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health at Ext. 4012.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.