

Drowning Surveillance Guidelines for Scene Investigators (Police & Coroner/ME)

Law Enforcement and Coroners/Medical Examiners conduct scene investigations which contain key information for Child Death Review Teams. The scene investigation reports can provide essential insights and details into the circumstances surrounding the drowning death of a child when documented properly. This information is useful for public health professionals and others interested in preventing childhood drowning.

Descriptive documentation, photographs and sketches of the scene as well as information obtained from witness interviews can provide important insights into the circumstances and risk factors for child drowning. A detailed narrative description of the incident can provide a clear understanding of the sequences of events before, during and after the incident and the circumstances involved.

Specifically, the areas that are of interest that would advance knowledge of factors that contribute to child drowning and could guide interventions and measures to prevent child drownings are:

Circumstances leading up to and at the time of the drowning	
<p>Incident information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Type of dwelling or facility ▪ Site of incident (i.e. single family home, community pool, apartment pool) if home, whose; rental or HUD ▪ Number of people at scene, presence of other children ▪ Occasion (i.e. birthday party, neighborhood gathering, BBQ, etc.) ▪ Drug and alcohol use and by whom 	<p>Body of Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Type (i.e. in-ground pool, spa, etc.) ▪ If pool/spa, when built ▪ Condition of water (i.e. murky, green) ▪ Objects/toys in water ▪ Take photos
<p>Barriers or other protective devices to prevent children from accessing water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fences (both property line and those around pool) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Description of each in terms of type, height, general condition, whether or not a child can go through, over or under ▪ For pool fence, does it completely surround pool ▪ Gates (self-closing/self latching, open or closed) ▪ Door alarms, locks, pool cover, other measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Type, general condition, functionality and use ▪ Take photos of the above. 	<p>Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specifics on how child gained access to water ▪ Where was and what was child doing prior to the incident ▪ How long was child missing ▪ Swim ability, history of swim lessons ▪ Prior risk behaviors ▪ Clothing ▪ Use of flotation device
<p>Supervision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree and level of supervision ▪ Who was supervising, age and what were they doing ▪ Supervisor swim and CPR ability ▪ Drug and alcohol use - will they submit to Preliminary Alcohol Screening (PAS) 	<p>CPR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ By whom, how long, and their ability. ▪ Response times of police and fire. ▪ Delay time in calling 911 from time child was observed

Documenting presence or absence of relevant information is important. If there is no documentation related to a particular item, a determination on whether or not this is a problem or risk factor cannot be made. For example, if water clarity was not documented for all cases, we cannot make a determination if this is an issue in the drowning of young children.

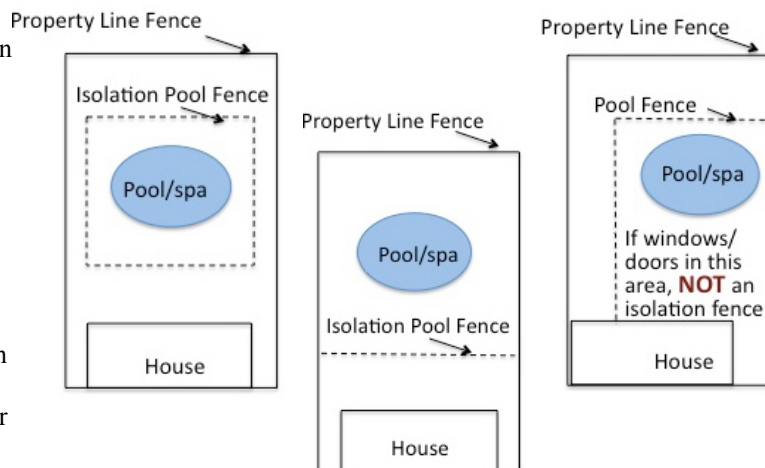
Two resources are available for observing and documenting drowning related information: *Quick Reference Guide for Scene Investigators* (next page) and Appendix 1. *Issues and Questions to Consider When Conducting Review of Child Drowning Case.*

Quick Reference Guide for Scene Investigators

To facilitate incident comparison and data collection, please refer to this guide before completing investigation report.

Property Line Fencing – In a home with a pool or spa, this type of fence is typically positioned along the property line in an effort to keep neighboring children and uninvited adults from accessing the pool/spa. Property line fencing is an important barrier, but it does *not* restrict access to the pool area from the home itself.

Isolation Fencing – This fencing is designed to restrict access from the house structure to the pool/spa area by completely separating the house from the pool/spa. Proper placement of Isolation Fencing allows access to the pool/spa **ONLY** through the gate(s) in that fence. There is no direct access from the house or garage to the pool through doors or windows.



Barrier Standards – Fences should be at least 4 feet high (CA code requires 60” for a new pool, but does allow for mesh fencing, which would probably be 48”), climb-resistant and well maintained. There should be **NO** openings in which a child can pass through or under the fence (4 inches or less between vertical members and/or at the base of the fence). Fences should have gates that are self-closing, self-latching and open out from the pool/spa. All gates and alarms should be functional and in good working order. (Note: you never want a self-locking gate on a residential pool, as the gate tends to be propped open during a pool party or activity, since not everyone has a key, and the self-locking gate may prevent quick rescue should it be necessary. Key-lockable is good, along with self-latching.)

Self-Closing / Self-Latching Gates – A properly installed gate will open outward from the pool/spa area. A self-closing gate will operate on hinges that allow the gate to completely close by itself. A self-latching gate means that the latch catches securely by itself. Latches should be child resistant, with the release knob mounted at least 54” from grade.

Pool and Spa Safety Covers – Not all covers are designed for safety (some are for heating purposes only). A safety cover meets American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) International voluntary standard F1346-9, which includes a requirement to hold a minimum of 485 pounds. They can be motor-driven (automatic) or manual.

Pool Safety Nets – These woven-rope type structures prevent full access to the water. When installed, they secure to permanent connectors installed directly into the concrete decking of the pool area, hold a minimum of 485 pounds and must have a maximum opening of 4” or less.

Door and Window Alarms – These are special alarms (battery or wired to home electrical system) on pool-access doors and windows that sound loudly throughout the house when a door or window is opened unexpectedly. They should have a temporary bypass switch located at least 54” from the ground, which allows an adult to pass through the door without activating the alarm. This switch should automatically reset after each use. An alarm connected to a home security system is **NOT** designed for drowning prevention.

Pool Alarms – Also known as water alarms, these either float in the water or are attached to the side of the pool, and sound when a child or other large object disturbs the water.

Floaties / Water Wings – Flotation devices such as inflatable arm bands, pool noodles, inflatable water rings and rafts are **NOT** US Coast Guard approved. These should not be used in place of US Coast Guard approved life jackets.

California Pool Safety Law - California’s Swimming Pool Safety Act (Health and Safety Code Sections 115920-115929) requires at least one approved safety barrier be in place all pools and spas built after January 1, 1998 and for any pools being remodeled.

Excerpted from Drowning Surveillance Handbook, California Chapter 4, American Academy of Pediatrics, June 2010
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