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THE NATIONAL SAFE KIDS CAMPAIGN TACKLES CHILDHOOD INJURY THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES

WASHINGTON, DC -- The National SAFE KIDS Campaign will launch major public policy initiatives to tackle preventable injuries -- the number one killer of children in the United States -- during Community SAFE KIDS Week, May 13 - 19, 1991.

"We are working to make childhood injury prevention a public policy priority for federal, state and local decision-makers," said C. Everett Koop, M.D., former U. S. Surgeon General and Chairman of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "We want stronger injury prevention legislation and an improvement in products and the environment that will reduce the incidence of needless death and disability."

The Campaign's 100 coalitions in 40 states and the District of Columbia are working to build momentum in support of a national policy favoring: (1) bike helmets for every child; (2) anti-scald devices in every bathtub, shower head and sink; and (3) working smoke detectors in every home. Efforts include working with community leaders, legislators and building code bodies to increase the effectiveness of current laws and provide new, effective model legislation.

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign will distribute model legislation to its coalitions outlining the points that should be included in any bike helmet, anti-scald or smoke detector legislation.

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"Model legislation outlines the significant components of a particular public policy initiative," said William C. Kamela, Public Policy Director, National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "By having a model they can refer to, developers of legislation will be better able to identify and enforce the most important safety concerns and tackle them accordingly."

The Campaign is focusing its efforts on the injury areas in which children are most often injured.

BIKE INJURIES

In 1989, over 350,000 children age 14 and under were injured in bike-related incidents. Over 350 died. Although bike helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by 85 percent and the risk of brain injury by almost 90 percent, only five percent of all child cyclists wear bike helmets.

"It's ridiculous that children are still dying in bike crashes when we know wearing a helmet can help prevent serious injury," said Dr. Martin R. Eichelberger, Director, Trauma Services, Children's National Medical Center and President of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "Kids shouldn't die from falling off their bikes."

Working in selected states, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, will testify at hearings, meet with legislators, provide technical assistance to state legislators and their staffs and write letters of support for comprehensive and enforceable bike helmet legislation. The Campaign also has produced a chart detailing the rapidly changing legislative developments at the state and local level. The chart provides an at-a-glance look at the key provisions of each bill. It is updated quarterly to keep pace with state and local legislative movement.

SCALD BURN INJURIES

Each year, 32,000 children are scalded by hot substances (most often in the kitchen). An additional 5,000 children are scalded by hot tap water (most often in the bathroom). Many of these injuries can be avoided by the installation and use of anti-scald devices in faucets.

Across the country, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign has testified and introduced new amendments at building code hearings asking that the anti-scald device be required in all new housing.

"The thousands of children scalded by hot tap water each year demonstrate the need for a high limit temperature control valve to provide a much needed level of safety," said Kamela. "We need to make sure that anti-scald valves are available to all children -- especially those from low-income families, who are at highest risk for this type of injury."

RESIDENTIAL FIRE INJURIES

Residential fires are the number one danger to children in the home. Each year, 1,200 children age 14 and younger die and another 11,400 sustain injuries in residential fires. Of these injuries, 7,300 are to children 4-years-old and younger. Preschool children have a fire death rate of more than twice the national average.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) reports that the chances of dying in a residential fire are cut in half by the presence of a working smoke detector. Unfortunately, 90 percent of all child fire deaths occur in homes without working detectors. Eleven states still do not have any type of smoke detector ordinance in place. The National SAFE KIDS Campaign is working to assure that all states require at least one working smoke detector in each home.

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"Having a working smoke detector can mean the difference between life and death to many children," said Herta Feely, Executive Director, National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "Too often though, families are lulled into a false sense of security once a smoke detector is installed. They never test or maintain it -- assuming that the detector will work forever. As a result, between 35 and 40 percent of all smoke detectors do not work."

Public policy initiatives have long been used to address injury issues. The enactment of the Poison Prevention Packaging Act of 1970 requiring the use of child-resistant caps on most medications, cut the number of childhood poisonings in half.

The use of child safety seats is another excellent example of a highly successful public policy initiative. All 50 states now require the use of these seats in cars. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that, in 1988, the use of these seats prevented 28,000 injuries and 200 deaths of children under age four.

To get involved with the National SAFE KIDS Campaign's public policy efforts, contact the nearest SAFE KIDS Coalition or write to:

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign
111 Michigan Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20010-2970
ATTN: Public Policy Department

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign is a long-term effort to prevent injury -- the number one killer of children. More than 90 national organizations and 100 state and local coalitions in 40 states and the District of Columbia are taking part in the Campaign. Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, M.D., is the Chairman of the Campaign.

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