

Pond & Garden Water Safety

February 2008

Water holds a particular fascination for young children. Whether the water is held in a garden pond, a rainwater butt, a paddling pool or a bucket, a young child will invariably investigate. Due to this natural inquisitiveness from 1995 to 2005 68 children under the age of six have drowned in a garden pond or in the back garden (excluding swimming pools), quite often within the space of a few minutes of the supervising adult being momentarily distracted. It is impossible for any parent to supervise a toddler one hundred percent of the time so it is essential that steps be taken to reduce the risk of drowning within the garden where the child will play.



The Statistics

Between the years 1995 and 2005, 147 children under the age of 6 drowned at a residential location including those who were left momentarily in the bath, those who fell in buckets, those who drowned in residential swimming pools, and those who fell into garden ponds.

- This accounts for over half (63%) of all children under the age of 6 who drowned during this time.
- Of children who drowned at residential locations 58 (39%) were drowned in a garden pond.
- During 2005 alone, 5 children were drowned in garden ponds, this is about the average per year as shown by the statistics.
- Many of these deaths could have been prevented.

0-5 year old drowning in and around the home, by age, 1995-2005

Home Feature	Age						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Pond	2	22	24	5	3	2	58
Bath	20	15	11	8	1	2	57
Residential Swimming pool	2	5	8	4	2	1	22
Outdoor container (bucket, tank, butt)		3	7				10
Total	24	45	50	17	6	5	147

Causes

Children aged between one and two are particularly at risk. As the child increases in age, the risk decreases. There are three main reasons for this profile:

1. Between the ages of one and two, infant's mobility increases at a terrific, but irregular rate, such that they can escape parents' supervision and get into difficulties unexpectedly quickly.
2. Whilst mobility may increase, stability and co-ordination remain poor.
3. It is not until the age of four or five that children begin to understand the concept of danger, and begin to heed warnings given to them.

Even the shallowest of ponds can be lethal. From a child's perspective, a 500mm deep pond is equivalent to an adult falling into 1800mm of water – the child being unable to climb out of the water.

Advice

Parents should check the garden regularly. Containers holding rainwater should be emptied or sealed to prevent children gaining access, and paddling pools should always be emptied and turned upside down after use. Although garden ponds have great ecological benefits, RoSPA advises parents of children aged under 6 years old to temporarily fill them in. Use it as a sandpit, garden, or something similar, until your child is out of the key at risk age.

Supervision

Almost all child drowning incidents in the back garden or garden pond occurred after a break down in supervision. If parents with children under the age of 6 choose to maintain a garden pond they must be aware that they need to constantly supervise these children in the garden. They also need to ensure that the pond is inaccessible to the child who may escape supervision.

Mesh or Grille

Rigid mesh or a grille can be used to create a secure cover for a garden pond. The following points should be considered in having a grille installed on your pond:

- The mesh must be firmly secured and regularly checked for signs of deterioration.
- The mesh or grille needs to be able to support the weight of a child and should remain above the surface of the water at all times. Grilles beneath the surface will not remove all of the risk of drowning especially to toddlers and crawling babies who could still end up face down in water and not be able to get themselves upright.
- Modular interlocking plastic grids that can be made to fit various shapes and sizes of ponds are available as well as steel mesh. Security grille suppliers and metal stockholders can cut steel mesh to size on request.
- The mesh should ideally be heavy duty (i.e. 6-8mm diameter wire) and so be self-supporting. Thinner wire mesh will require supporting with a frame.
- Fencing materials, such as chicken wire, are unsuitable as they will sag in the centre with the child's weight. A number of tragic accidents have occurred when children have managed to crawl beneath wire, or pulled the wire aside. Drowning incidents have occurred in less than 300mm of water.
- The mesh should have a grid size of no more than 80mm x 80mm - this size ensures against entrapment.
- Depending on the size of the pond, a frame may be required to provide stability and anchor points. The frame needs to be sited so that it is clear of the maximum

water level height that the pond can reach and take into consideration any deflection or sagging that could occur.

- Methods used to secure and lock the frame in place should ensure that there is no risk of entrapment between any moving parts.
- The cover should be left in place until the child can recognise and understand danger.

Fencing

Fencing off the pond is only a partial solution and can often lead parents into a false sense of security. If the pond is fenced it must be of such a height and design that makes it secure, preventing access by young children. This is usually achieved with a vertical railed fence with bars no more than 100mm apart. This barrier should be at least 1.1m in height, following the safety principles of the Building Regulations. If a gate provides access it must be of a similar design to the fence and be kept locked shut. Specific swimming pool gates have been designed with extended latch mechanisms (which are out of reach of children).

Pond Guard Manufacturers

Please note that the only design that we agree with is one that will not allow a child to have any contact with the water once the grill is in place. Designs that have the grill below or equal to the water level do not fully remove the water hazard.

RoSPA does not endorse organisations or products however we do hold a list of suppliers of pond grills and covers. This can be obtained through contacting the Leisure Department at leisurehelp@rospa.com.

Further Information

NWSF Garden Ponds

<http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/watersafetyathome/gardenponds.htm>

RoSPA Water Safety Information

<http://www.rospa.com/leisuresafety/water/index.htm>

Further Information and Advice

<http://www.rospa.com/leisuresafety/information/index.htm>

RoSPA's leaflet 'Be Water Wise', aimed at children, can be ordered in packs of 10 can be ordered at the [RoSPA online shop](#).

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