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Keep Children Safe Around Windows

Despite the cool start to spring this April, the weather will warm up as it does every year, and windows will be opened for the first time in months as we invite spring breezes in to air out our homes. Although we may take them for granted, windows are an important feature in any home. They let in light, provide ventilation, and serve as a means of emergency escape. For families with small children, a balancing act is required to ensure children do not fall out of windows while maintaining the ability to flee from a burning building.

According to information obtained from Safe Kids U.S.A., nearly 5000 children fall out of windows in the United States every year. Most of these children are toddlers, and about 28% are hospitalized as a result of the fall. About 20 children die from these falls annually. Many more become disabled for life; a fall of 10 feet can result in spinal cord injury, paralysis, or fatal head injury. But there are measures parents and caregivers can take to reduce the likelihood of a fall from a window.

The single most important point to remember is that children, particularly toddlers, require active adult supervision every moment they are awake. Further, homeowners and renters should inspect all of their windows every year to make sure they are working properly.

The National Safety Council has designated the week of April 22-28 National Window Safety Week to remind the public that “windows play a vital role in home fire safety, but they can also pose a risk of a fall in the home if other safety measures are not followed.” They point out that fires and falls are among the leading causes of injury and death in young children, and offer the following window safety tips:

- Develop a family emergency escape plan that includes two means of escape from every room. Make sure every member of the family understands the plan, and practice it regularly.
- Teach children how to safely use a window in the event of an emergency.
- Make sure windows are not painted or nailed shut.
- Establish rules that children may not play around windows and patio doors, and strictly enforce those rules.
- Keep windows closed and locked when children are around. If it is necessary to open windows for ventilation, open windows the child cannot reach, or open the top sash only if the windows are double-hung. If this is not possible, do not open windows more than 4 inches (a window stop can help with this)— children have been known to fall or get stuck in windows that are opened as little as 5 inches.
- Keep furniture, large toys, and anything else a child might climb, away from windows.
- If you install security guards, bars, grills, grates, or other fall prevention devices, be sure they have a release mechanism so they can be opened in the event of a fire or other emergency. It is a good idea to consult

your local fire department or building official to determine proper placement of such a guard.

- Do not assume an open window with a screen is safe. Screens are designed to keep insects out, NOT to keep children in.
- Never install an air conditioner in a window that may be required for escape or rescue from the building.
- Make sure there is at least one window in each sleeping room and living area that can be used for escape and rescue purposes.
- Consider planting shrubs and grass or placing wood chips beneath windows to lessen the impact should a fall occur.

While windows can pose a hazard for small children, it is important to keep in mind the role they play in home safety. It is up to adults to maintain windows in proper working order while protecting young children in their care. To obtain further information about window safety, contact the National Safety Council at www.nsc.org (630-285-2128), Safe Kids U.S.A. at www.usa.safekids.org, or the National Association of Home Builders at www.nahb.org (800-368-5242). For additional information about this or other public health concerns, contact the Central Connecticut Health District at www.ccthd.org (860-721-2824).