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June 2005

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## Low-cost pools pose hazards to children

About one in five of the above-ground pools sold in the U.S. each year may pose a safety hazard that neither industry nor government has effectively addressed. These inflatable pools may often be used without safety fences, alarms, covers, and other gear required with larger pools.

Consumer Product Safety Commission statistics show that 250 children under age 5 drown in pools each year, and another 1,800 are treated for submersion injuries. (Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death in children under 5.) But the CPSC doesn't always know the types of pools implicated in those incidents, so the extent of the problem that inflatable pools represent isn't known. A 17-month-old girl in Midwest City, Okla., drowned in a pool of this type in 2004, and there were at least two other child deaths that occurred in similar swimming pools.

Safety experts are concerned that people won't put a proper fence and gate around a pool, says Gary Smith, M.D., chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics' committee on injury, violence, and poison prevention. He says a fence is "the only proven safety intervention to prevent drowning."

The pools are sold at Wal-Mart, Target, and other stores. Prices range from less than \$50 to \$750. The pools stand 18 inches to 4 feet high and hold from less than 200 to more than 5,000 gallons of water. Industry estimates put annual sales at 30,000 to 40,000 pools.

The safety measures required for permanent in-ground and above-ground pools should apply to portable inflatable pools. But the safety experts we contacted say they're concerned that consumers don't implement those measures. "The responsible thing to do is to make sure that pools are fenced," said Mark Nichter, M.D., a member of the drowning-prevention committee of the National Safe Kids Campaign, a nonprofit advocacy group. "I want major manufacturers to issue warnings about the need for fencing."

An official at the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals, a trade group, says that above-ground pools meeting voluntary industry standards do include such



**THE DEEP END** Safety warnings and a filtration system help with large inflatable pools such as this one. But experts say it should also have a protective fence and other safety measures.

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warnings. But he told us the standards don't apply to pools holding less than 36 inches of water.

Some pool and spa experts worry that large inflatable pools can pose a health hazard if their water isn't changed often enough or is left untreated. Jim Manning, executive director of the trade group United Pool & Spa Association, said filters on the portable pools that he has seen seem inadequate. "Any pool should have a filter system that would recirculate water no less than every six hours," he said.

The CPSC would not discuss whether it is investigating these pools. "We are continuing to monitor our data regarding these types of pools," a spokesman said.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Follow your local code requirements. Also check CPSC publications 359 and 362; they're available at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).
- Surround the pool with a fence that has a self-closing and self-latching gate with a lock. Also use a pool cover and alarm.
- Constantly supervise children when they are in and around the pool.

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