

STAR NORTH

Water safety is WARN's goal

Program focusing on pond, pool dangers offered as free service to residents' groups.

By Phil Dunlap

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An initiative by the Carmel Fire Department will bring helpful training information directly to the source of a major safety problem -- neighborhoods with retention ponds or unguarded swimming pools.

WARN, which stands for Water Awareness in Residential Neighborhoods, is designed to teach children and parents about the dangers of retention ponds and pools, and how to avoid becoming a victim of an accidental drowning.

Fire Department public information officer Bruce Knott told a gathering of the Carmel Neighborhood Association Network that he will come to any neighborhood meeting and bring the program direct to their door without cost.

Knott also said he is going to introduce a resolution to the City Council to require warning signs for subdivision retention ponds, similar to that passed by Fishers last year.

"But signage is only as good as the people who obey it," he said. "So the awareness part is as important, or more important, to me."

Those at most risk -- children too young to read -- will be the focus of Knott's personal visit to neighborhood get-togethers.

"We've had two children die in Indiana in retention ponds, one in Franklin Township and one in Fishers. That's what got all this kicked off in the first place," he said.

"The first line of defense has got to be the parents. You just have to be more responsible with your kids than you are with your Corvette."

WARN, in fact, is a product of programs started by the Fishers and Franklin Township departments in the wake of those accidents.

The departments at first started separate awareness programs, then combined their efforts once each learned what the other was doing.

Now, the WARN program is spreading to other departments, such as Carmel.

Part of Knott's presentation is a new video featuring "Diver Dan," which explains, at a youth's level, how to behave when around water, whether at a swimming pool or a pond.

Knott also talks to parents separately, teaching adult responsibility in more graphic terms regarding fundamental precautions that should be considered before allowing children near water.

When talking to parents, Knott makes sure they are aware just how quickly a child can disappear from sight, all aimed at averting accidents involving children too young to read the signs but old enough to be curious.

All children are naturally attracted to water, Knott said, but too often no one is paying attention.

"You'd be amazed at how many people put more time into what restaurant they're going to than they do to (knowing) what's going on with their kids," he said.

One woman who lives in an all-adult community asked Knott at the neighborhood network meeting how to approach people whose children play in her subdivision's pond.

"If any of you don't feel comfortable confronting a parent of a kid who is ignoring the rules, I'll come out and talk to them one on one," Knott said.

Any group interested in seeing Knott's presentation can reach him at 1-317-571-2662.