



# The hazard of toddler bucket drowning

Since 1984, the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has received reports of over 275 young children drowning in buckets. There are many bucket drownings reported each year around the world.

Australia's current drought conditions have led to the increased use of buckets and other containers in households across the country. The increased use of buckets, in most cases as water saving devices, poses a real threat to toddlers. While many parents are aware of the obvious risks posed by pools and baths to their young children, a bucket can hold an equally hazardous drowning threat.

To deal with this drowning hazard, parents or carers can follow some simple steps to ensure that toddlers and young children are kept away from buckets containing water or other liquids.

## Why do buckets pose a special threat to toddlers?

There are some key reasons why a bucket containing liquid can present a drowning hazard to toddlers. These include:

- toddlers can topple easily into water containers as their heads are heavier than the rest of their body
- young children learning to crawl and walk have increased ability to access hazards
- toddlers are curious by nature and like to explore their environment
- buckets or containers can often be over half the height of an average toddler.

## How do toddlers come into contact with buckets or containers?

Prolonged drought conditions have encouraged households to become more conscious of water saving activities with most states in Australia implementing

tough water restrictions. While the community's efforts to become more water conscious are commendable, parents and carers must be aware of the real dangers buckets present to toddlers.

It should also be noted that while the drought has increased the use of buckets in the home, it is also a common household tool used for everyday activities such as doing laundry or cleaning floors. Buckets must be seen as a real hazard to youngsters.

There are some household chores that frequently require the use of a bucket. These include cleaning and mopping of surfaces, pre-soaking clothes before washing, bathing children and washing motor vehicles.

There are also unique water saving activities that require the use of a bucket or container. Due to the current drought these activities have become more common within Australia. These activities are:

- capturing excess water when showering
- capturing excess rainfall outside the home structure
- recycling water from the washing machine
- transferring sink water to the garden.

When undertaking activities such as these, parents or carers should be alert to the hazard of toddler drowning.

## Prevent the potential hazard of toddler bucket drowning

Once a parent or carer is aware of the dangers presented by buckets, there are some easy steps to protect toddlers. Most of these steps apply to any water hazard, although there are some that are specific to buckets.

A supervising adult should never:

- leave a bucket containing even a small amount of liquid unattended where a child may gain access to it. A child can drown in the time it takes to answer the phone
- leave a toddler in the care of another young child, especially when in the middle of cleaning or mopping
- leave rainfall buckets on the ground or at a height that can be reached by toddlers.

A supervising adult should always:

- ensure that, after use, the bucket is emptied and stored in a place where young children cannot reach it
- keep an eye on buckets containing liquid, as toddlers can fall silently into water hazards.

## Learn resuscitation

The first few minutes in an emergency are vital and can be the difference between life and death. A drowning victim may require immediate resuscitation, which cannot wait for emergency services. You should:

- Learn CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and update your training regularly.
- Keep CPR instructions in a central part of the home, where you can easily access it.
- Keep emergency numbers by the phone.

### Be aware of the hazard and remove the risk

While a bucket may seem harmless, the international experience illustrates that it can be a life threatening hazard for young children. Removing the risk requires parents and carers to be proactive and alert. As with all water safety, adults need to be aware of how vulnerable toddlers are.

### ACCC contacts

ACCC Infocentre  
1300 302 502

Small business helpline  
1300 302 021

ACCC website  
[www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au)

For all other business information go to [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au)

Publications can be ordered through the ACCC Infocentre or you can download electronic copies for free from the ACCC website.

### Important notice

The information in this fact sheet is for general guidance only. It reflects the ACCC's views on what is required to comply with certain provisions of the Act. It does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied on as a statement of the law relating to the Act. You should obtain legal advice if there is doubt about whether any conduct may breach the Act.

Other federal or state-based laws may impose additional requirements or responsibilities on your businesses when dealing with other businesses or consumers, beyond the requirements of the *Trade Practices Act 1974*.