



Speech by

# Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Hansard Tuesday, 6 February 2007

---

## CHILD DROWNING

**Ms STRUTHERS** (Algester—ALP) (12.05 pm): In the past month four children have died tragically having been trapped in cars. Today I want to draw public attention to another risk for children, particularly toddlers, and that is death from drowning in buckets and containers. Due to the water restrictions we are all playing our part; we are all putting out buckets and storing water either in tanks or other containers. We are making great efforts and I want to commend the public for those efforts statewide. My own rates notice showed that my own household water usage had dropped by 70 per cent. I and others in my household have not stopped showering, but we have a 5,000 litre tank and we have a pool cover—and it is certainly working.

This practice of using buckets and containers around the house has really drawn public attention to the need for people to be very careful where kids are involved. The Kidsafe organisation, a non-profit organisation with a tremendous record in promoting safety for kids, has released a national red alert this week to all members of parliament and water authorities indicating that this high use of buckets and containers can be a real problem to toddlers and calls for caution. Dr Mark Stokes, the President of Kidsafe Victoria, said—

With governments and water authorities all over Australia urging the community to collect water in buckets from the shower there needs to be a national awareness campaign alerting parents to the drowning dangers of storing water.

There are millions of buckets of water being stored in homes every day in Australia with each bucket representing a potential drowning situation or near drowning which can leave children with severe brain damage—

or can cause death. He goes on—

Many parents are unaware of the risk ...

The risk was drawn to my attention and the reason I have responded so well to this alert is that I have buckets around the house, too. When I was putting the washing out the other day there were two buckets filled with water because we had that great period of rain. I thought to myself, 'I have not been taking enough care in my own household.' My young boy, Alexander, is now 14 months old and I am proud to say that he is walking. So that little fellow is very likely to put his head in a bucket. He is so curious and he toddles around the house very fast now. I urge members in their own local communities to draw attention to this very important public issue. I commend Kidsafe, a very good organisation, for the efforts they are going to not only on this issue but also on many other issues affecting kids' safety.

Let me fill in honourable members on a few of the facts about drownings involving children. Drowning is the most common cause of accidental death in Australia for children aged between zero and four. An international comparison of drowning rates indicates that Australia has the second worst record in the world for toddler drowning. On average, 14 children aged zero to four drown in Queensland each year. Not all of these are pool drownings or in the ocean. Some of these are in buckets or containers.

Infants under one are most frequently drowned in baths or buckets. For every toddler drowning, three or four others are admitted to hospital following an immersion incident. These children are at severe risk of brain damage from lack of oxygen. A baby can drown in less than five centimetres of water. So it

may not even be a full bucket; it could be a container that may just have a small amount of water. We need to be more aware of that.

Seventy-seven per cent of drowning reports state that the child was clothed at the time of immersion. Therefore, water activity was not actually intended. I guess that alerts us to the fact that these are genuine accidents—it is kids being curious; it is kids wandering around. Parents really need to keep a close eye on this risk. Any collections of water, be it swimming pools, bathtubs, ponds, buckets, dog bowls and so on, pose a risk. In fact, there have been deaths by kids drowning in eskies with melted ice in them. That is how cautious we all need to be.

In terms of action, I will certainly take up this issue with the Minister for Health to see if there is anything we can do in any of the activities we are promoting through Queensland Health. Certainly, we will continue to provide ongoing support to Kidsafe, which is a non-profit organisation which has sponsorship from Queensland Health. I urge parents to check that buckets and containers are out of reach of toddlers, to familiarise their children with water safety and to learn CPR because vital seconds and minutes can make a real difference. It is a very important issue. Members, have a look for that email from Kidsafe Victoria. I know it has the support of Kidsafe Queensland. We can all do more to prevent these very tragic deaths.