



# TDCJ Risk Management's *Training Circular*

Volume 8 Issue 01

Risk Management Issues

January 2008

## ***POISON PREVENTION***



Every year poisonings result in nearly 900,000 visits to emergency rooms and some 20,000 deaths. The overwhelming majority of poisonings occur at home. Many of these poisonings can be safely handled at home if you call the nationwide poison control center 1-800-222-1222. Many common household products can be poisonous including pesticides, household cleaners, furniture polish, lighter fluids, medicines, and supplements containing iron.

### **Unintentional Poisonings: The Statistics**

- In 2004 there were 2,438,644 human toxic exposures reported to 62 poison control centers in the United States.
- Of these over 2.4 million exposures, 93% occurred at a residence (with peak hours being 4:00 - 11:00 PM).
- On average, U.S. poison centers handle one poison exposure every 13 seconds.
- Children younger than 3 years of age were involved in 38% of the cases, and 51% involved children younger than 6 years of age.

- The vast majority (84.1%) of poison exposures were unintentional.
  - Ingestion was the pathway of poisoning in 76.8% of the cases, followed by dermal (skin) (7.5%), inhalation (breathing) (5.9%), and ocular (eye) (5.2%).
  - The majority of cases (73.9%) were managed in a non-health care facility (i.e., not a hospital, physician offices, or clinics), usually at the site of the exposure – the patient's own home.
  - About 14,500 children under the age of 6 were exposed to rat poisons containing warfarin (a blood thinner) in 2004.
  - Generic substances (not all inclusive) involved in pediatric (under age of 6) exposures were: Adhesives/glues, Arts/crafts/office supplies, Batteries, Chemicals, Cleaning substances, Cosmetics & personal care, Deodorizers, Dyes, Fertilizers, Paints & stripping agents, Pesticides, Pharmaceuticals/vitamins, Plants, Polishes & waxes, and Tobacco products.
  - Of the 1,183 fatalities, 27 involved children younger than 6 years of age. Fourteen of these children died after swallowing prescription medications.
  - 11.3% of environmental inquiries to poison control centers involved questions about pesticides.
- Although pesticides can be beneficial to society, they can be dangerous if used incorrectly or if they are not stored properly and out of the reach of children. According to data collected by the American Association of Poison Control Centers, in 2003, children under the age of six were exposed to pesticides 50,415 times; bleaches and hypochlorite 20,801 times; and disinfectants 8,893 times. However, experts estimate that this represents only fourth to third of pesticide exposure incidents reported to health care professionals. Health care professionals are encouraged to report all exposure incidents involving pesticides to the poison control hotline at 1-800-222-1222. A further challenge to collecting reliable pesticide exposure information is the fact that pesticide exposure may be misdiagnosed since common symptoms of acute exposure—including nausea, headaches and

dizziness—mimic symptoms of the common flu.

A survey by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regarding pesticides used in and around the home revealed that almost half (47%) of all households **with** children under the age of five had at least one pesticide stored in an unlocked cabinet, less than 4 feet off the ground (i.e., within the reach of children). Approximately 75% of households **without** children under the age of five also stored pesticides in an unlocked cabinet, less than 4 feet off the ground. This number is especially significant because 13% of all pesticide poisoning incidents occur in homes other than the child's home.

Some tips to keep your family safe:

- Keep the nationwide poison control center's number, 1-800-222-1222 and your doctor's phone number handy.
- Keep products in original containers with labels and out of the reach of children.
- Get down to a child's height and look at potential hazards from their point of view.
- Make sure children wash hands after using the bathroom and before eating.
- If your children are in day care, check where the day care provider keeps cleaning products, medicines and other potentially hazardous products to make sure these products are locked up and out of children's reach.
- Read the label and follow directions and precautions for safe and effective use, storage, and first aid.

- Use hazardous products away from children, toys, food, and pets, as directed.
- Store products out of the reach of children; even if you don't have small children. Many poisonings happen when children are visiting homes where no children live.
- Properly dispose of unused or unnecessary household products and unused or expired medicines.
- Check the playground equipment where your children play to be sure that none of the wood has been treated with potentially hazardous chemicals.
- Induce vomiting only if a physician or a poison control center instructs you to do so.

### How to Prevent Poisonings in Your Home

As consumers, we buy more than a quarter of a million different household products that are used in and around the home for medication, cleaning, cosmetic purposes, exterminating insects, and killing weeds. These items are valuable in the home and for yard maintenance, but misuse, especially when products are used in inappropriate applications or quantities, can cause illness, injury and even death.

Each year more than 6,000 people die and an estimated 300,000 suffer disabling illnesses as a result of unintentional poisoning by solid and liq-

uid substances. Unintentional poisonings can happen to anyone, at any time, in any situation.

Home unintentional poisonings, however, can be prevented. While child-resistant packaging has greatly reduced the number of fatalities among children under five years of age, parents, grandparents, and other caregivers must still be cautious. Following label directions for all products, including medication dosages, and proper storage of potentially toxic products are important precautions to heed.

### Statistics

- Poisonings from solids and liquids such as drugs, medicines, poisonous houseplants, cleaning products, and pesticides caused 6,300 deaths in the home in 1998 alone.
- An additional 500 deaths in the home in 1998 were due to poisonings from gases and vapors such as carbon monoxide.
- These deaths are not all among children. Another age group at risk is adults age 25 through 44. Many adults are unintentionally poisoned when they do not follow label directions on medications or household chemicals.
- You can keep yourself and family members safer by being aware of potential hazards and observing these suggestions from the National Safety Council on ways to poison-proof your home.

### Bathroom

- Have a "child-proof" cabinet that locks. Even if your medicine cabinet is "high up," young-

sters are inquisitive and avid climbers. They can easily reach a cabinet by climbing from the toilet (or other convenient object) to the sink and thus reach into the cabinet.

- Use child-resistant caps and keep medication lids tightly closed. A child-resistant cap is meaningless if not properly fastened after each use.
- Never take medication in front of a child, or refer to pills as candy. Kids often mimic adults. Also, something that tastes awful to an adult may not faze a small child.
- Always follow the recommended dosage set forth by your doctor for all medications.
- Some mouthwashes contain enough alcohol to poison small children. Consider alternative products.
- Some toilet bowl cleansers are dangerously caustic and capable of burning tissue if ingested.

### Bedroom

- Mothballs and crystals should be hung in containers. If such products are used in closets or chests, they should be out of the reach of toddlers.
- Keep personal care items are such as hair spray, cologne, perfumes, nail polish remover, nail glue remover, and astringents where children can't get into them.

### Living Room

- People who visit may carry medications in coat pockets, jackets, and purses, all of which are perfect hunting grounds for a curious child. Hang garments and store purses where children are not likely to get at them.
- Children may be exposed to different lead sources in your home. Small children may chew on window sills, eat paint chips, or suck on their hands or toys, exposing themselves to lead dust. Lead poisoning can cause serious medical problems, especially in young children. Be sure your home is lead safe. See our [lead poisoning](#) fact sheet for more information.

### Kitchen

- Check under the sink and in cabinets. Look for stored products that could be hazardous when accessible to young children. These could include such items as bleaching agents, rust removers, drain cleaners, ammonia, oven cleaners, detergents, furniture polish, floor wax, metal polish, wax remover, and wall/floor/toilet bowl cleaners. Even food extracts, such as vanilla and almond, are potential poisons. If products cannot be moved, install safety latches on cupboard doors to keep inquisitive youngsters out.
- Cleaning compounds and foods should never be stored together.
- Keep all substances in their

original containers. Using beverage bottles or cans for storing cleaning fluids, liquid floor wax, and other household mixtures is very hazardous. Children, and even adults, might mistake the contents for the original beverage. Also, labels on original containers give important usage and safety information.

- Keep potentially hazardous cleaning compounds capped. Do not leave an uncapped container unattended even "just a minute" if toddlers are present.

### Additional Precautions

- Keep the numbers of your local poison control center (or national toll-free number, 800-222-1222) or family doctor posted near the telephone. Have the original container and its label when you call.
- Keep syrup of ipecac available but use only when instructed to by a doctor or poison control center.
- Use safety latches or combination locks to prevent curious children from getting into cabinets and drawers. Don't let children watch you open them. Kids learn fast.
- Many poisonings of youngsters happen when the household routine has been interrupted. Examples of such changes include: when a parent is ill; when a family is moving; when a family is on a trip; when there is a guest in the home; when there is family tension; when seasonal products are

in use. In addition, hungry or tired children are prone to putting the first available object they find into their mouths.

- Throw out unneeded or expired medicines (OTC and prescriptions). Look for the
- For handling poisonings and other emergencies, everyone should be trained in [First Aid](#).

### Especially for Older Adults

- Request medicine labels be printed in larger type.
- If one type of child-restraint closure is difficult to use, ask your pharmacist for a different kind (especially if there are young children around).
- Make sure you are taking the medicine you intended; turn on the lights and double-check the label, especially when you are sleepy or sick.
- Avoid dosage errors - use dosage containers indicating day of week and/or time of day; don't leave it to memory.
- If you are taking two or more medications (prescription or OTC), be sure to check with your pharmacist to avoid unexpected drug interactions.
- Consider a dedicated medicine storage area—even if there are no kids in the house.

### Pets are Susceptible, Too!

- Poisonous anti-freeze tastes sweet to dogs and cats—clean up spills and leaks immediately and store care-

fully.

- Avoid feeding pets human food—chocolate can poison and kill a dog. Onions are potentially harmful. Pets are healthier eating food specially formulated for what they need.
- Don't spray or store cleaning or pesticide products near pet food or water dishes.
- Make sure animals can't get at bait products while they are in use.
- In the event of a spill, be sure to keep animals out of the area until it is cleaned up.
- Don't forget about wildlife. Spraying products on a windy day can carry the product into the water supply for wild animals.

### At Work

Fortunately, because of the hazards inherent with most its work environments, the TDCJ has an established hazardous chemical program. The agency goes to great lengths to protect staff and offenders from accidental contact with poisonous and hazardous chemicals. The program is founded on chemical control and accountability. The chemical program is very effective when these two program elements are understood and adhered to. In addition, the agency further protects staff and offenders through providing personal protective equipment (PPE).

PPE consists of protective equipment such as gloves, aprons, goggles and face shields. The protection used is dependent on the present or anticipated hazard. More information on protective personal equipment can be found in the Risk Management Pro-

gram Manual in policy RM-23.

If you have any questions regarding hazardous chemical use or personal protective equipment, please do not hesitate to contact Risk Management. It's important to remember that although the agency provides guidance and protection from accidental contact with hazardous chemicals, it is an individual responsibility to utilize this protection. In other words, the "I'm careful, it won't happen to me" philosophy is no excuse to not to use PPE when working around hazardous chemicals.

Training Circular  
TDCJ Risk Management Department  
Volume 08 Number 01  
January 2008

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