

Can Child Accidents Be Prevented in Your Community?

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THE fact that no immunization procedure could have prevented the accident which resulted in the fatal burning of a 2 year old child who had been playing with matches, in no way lessens the sorrow or anguish of the bereaved parents. The fact that no simple scientific method has been developed which could have prevented the deaths of about 12,000 children aged 1 to 14 who died last year as a result of accidents, in no way lessens the distress and the social and economic losses resulting from these deaths. But these facts do emphasize the responsibility of medical and public health agencies to study, develop, and apply effective measures for the control

of mortality and morbidity resulting from accidents.

Although the accident death rate among insured children in the age group 1 through 14 showed a 29 per cent reduction during a recent 15 year period, this decline was not consistent and compares unfavorably with the reduction in child deaths due to disease. As a result, accidents today represent the first cause of death among children and present a major child health problem. While much remains to be learned through research regarding the underlying physical and emotional factors responsible for accidents and involved in accident proneness, still we are far from

FIGURE 1—Fatal Accidents Among Children

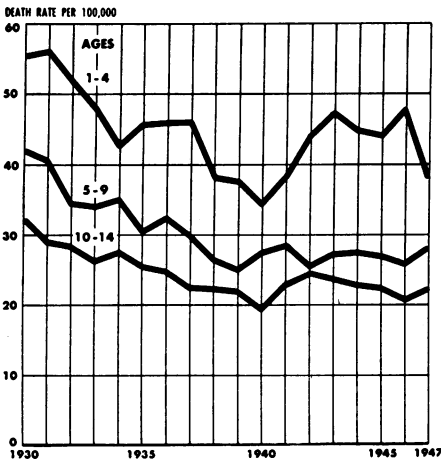
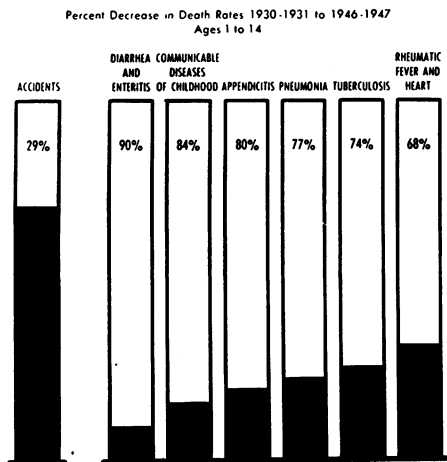


FIGURE 2—Accidents versus Certain Diseases



Experience of Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.—Weekly Industrial Department

utilizing fully our present knowledge as to the prevention and control of accidents.

National Approach to Child Safety

In an effort to stimulate more intensive interest in the subject of child safety, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company with the cosponsorship of the Children's Bureau of the Federal Security Agency, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Safety Council, has launched a continuous child safety program. It is the distinct purpose of this program—

1. To encourage parents, other adults, and older children responsible for the health and happiness of younger children, to
 - a. recognize the accident hazards confronting young children;
 - b. provide and maintain safe conditions for the child in the home and at play;
 - c. help the child, through example and guidance, to develop safe practices.
2. To encourage public health, medical, and other interested agencies to give added emphasis to child safety in their own programs.

Child Safety—A Community Challenge

The effectiveness of any effort to reduce the frequency and severity of child accidents will in the final analysis depend upon the steps taken by each community throughout the nation to study the child accident problem and to stimulate individual and collective control measures within its area of influence. The seriousness of this problem justifies such community action on an organized and sustained basis. Although local problems may warrant special emphasis and adaptation, child safety activities, where practical, should be integrated into the overall health and safety program of the community.

As a guide to organizations or individuals interested in planning or developing a continuous community child safety program, this article lists the

more important studies and activities which warrant consideration. It is recognized that all of these studies and activities may not be appropriate for every community and that additional suggestions may be developed as a result of a study of the local situation. It is hoped, however, that the following may provide a check list to aid in suggesting a practical program for your community.

ORGANIZING YOUR COMMUNITY FOR CHILD SAFETY

Sponsoring or Directing Agency

To be effective a local child safety program must be initiated and sponsored by some agency which accepts, as a major responsibility, the improvement of child health and safety in the community. Accordingly, an opportunity exists for the department of health, the health council, or the safety council, to assume this leadership, either singly or jointly, depending upon which type of leadership in a particular community is in a position to obtain the fullest possible cooperation of other agencies and to produce the most effective results.

An Organization Meeting

In addition to the leadership of the sponsoring agency, a sustained program to control child accidents in a community will require the support and active participation of such official agencies as the board of education, and the police, fire, hospital, building inspection, and park departments; as well as the cooperative efforts of nonofficial agencies having an interest in the conservation of child life. To develop this support and participation, and to discuss plans for a cooperative child safety program, a meeting of representatives of interested official and nonofficial agencies is desirable. Among the nonofficial agencies which might be invited to send representatives to such a meeting may be listed:

County Medical Society
 Other Professional Societies, including Medical, Dental, and Nursing
 Visiting Nurse Association
 Health Organizations
 Safety Council or Other Safety Organizations
 Social Service Agencies
 Youth Organizations (Boy and Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, 4H Clubs, etc.)
 Women's Organizations
 Automobile Club
 Parent-Teacher Associations
 Red Cross Chapter
 Service and Luncheon Clubs
 Insurance Club
 Neighborhood Associations
 Patriotic Groups
 The Local Press

The invitation to attend this preliminary meeting might be sent by the sponsoring agency, which should develop and arrange for the meeting; or the invitation might well be issued by the mayor in behalf of the sponsoring agency. A serious child accident or a series of child accidents in the community, accidents in nearby communities, or the existence of a particular local hazard to child safety will usually prove an effective motivating influence and might be given as one of the reasons for calling the meeting.

In arranging for this meeting the sponsoring agency should be prepared to present information regarding the child accident experience in the community and to outline, for discussion, some of the possible activities which might be conducted with the active cooperation of local agencies. This initial meeting should prove an excellent educational opportunity for the representatives attending, and the resulting publicity should prove of educational value throughout the community. During the meeting efforts should be exerted to create a continuing child safety committee.

SUGGESTED COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

An Inventory of Local Organizations

As a preparatory step in planning the local child safety program, an inventory

of local agency activities will be very desirable. Such an inventory might be conducted under the auspices of the newly organized child safety committee. Necessary information could be obtained through personal interviews with city officials and organization officers, or by mail questionnaires.

Those taking the inventory should seek and list information regarding the basic interest of the organization as it affects the child accident problem and its present or contemplated child safety activities. The inventory should also indicate the number of employees, members, and volunteers through whom child safety information can be disseminated; the number and type of employees or members who can actively participate by serving on committees, by investigating and analyzing accidents, by conducting surveys of environmental hazards, by preparing materials, by addressing audiences, and by handling necessary clerical work.

Obtaining Facts Regarding Child Accidents

Factual information regarding the frequency, types, and causes of child accidents in the community is essential to the development of an effective program. Such data are also necessary to the preparation of essential educational and publicity material. The collection and analysis of such data can in themselves serve as an effective educational device.

Data regarding the occurrence of fatal accidents to children are usually obtainable from the records of the local health and police departments. A follow-up of these records by a detailed questionnaire submitted to and filled in by the reporting physician (a plan followed by the Kansas State Department of Health and by the Nassau County, New York, Department of Health), or by personal interviews with members of the injured child's family, is desirable.

Programs based entirely on fatal accident data will fail to include many important causes of permanent and temporarily disabling injuries. Through the cooperation of physicians, visiting nurses, hospital and police authorities, case histories and other data regarding nonfatal injuries to children may be obtained. Questionnaires distributed through the schools and house-to-house interviews by trained interviewers have been used to collect such data.

Factual data regarding child accidents should include the age and sex of the child; the area of the community where the child lives and was injured; the place of the accident, i.e., home, school, playground, street, at work, or other specified location; the kind of accident; the nature and seriousness of the injury; the unsafe environmental conditions or practices involved in the accident. Where possible to obtain, information regarding the underlying causes of individual accidental injuries—such as contributing physical impairment of the injured, and the psychological, emotional, and sociological factors involved—is a valuable diagnostic aid.

Survey of Physical Conditions Affecting Child Safety

Information regarding environmental physical conditions which may affect child safety is essential in order that proper corrective action may be planned and undertaken. The analysis of accident data will disclose the location of some hazardous situations; observation and investigation will be necessary in order to determine other such situations, and to plan and recommend the proper remedial measures.

Among the areas justifying study in most communities to determine child accident hazards, may be included—

The Home and Its Environs

Unsafe physical conditions in and

around homes are important contributing causes of child as well as adult accidents. The correction of home hazards, particularly as they are affected by child growth and development, should accordingly be considered as an essential phase of a child accident prevention program.

Although local regulations in some communities may permit fire or sanitary inspectors to enter private homes for the purpose of checking compliance with their respective local requirements, the official inspection of homes for unsafe conditions is seldom, if ever, provided for by law. Fire and sanitary inspectors, however, can render an effective community service by calling attention to unsafe conditions, particularly those affecting child safety, as noted during their authorized inspections.

Physicians and public health nurses, because of their close contact with parents, are frequently in a position to encourage the correction of unsafe conditions, particularly those affecting children.

Home inspection check lists have been used in a number of communities to encourage voluntary home inspection. These check lists have been distributed to children in the schools to take home for their parents or other adults to fill out and to return by the children.

The School Premises

Unsafe conditions on the school premises may not only be the cause of injury to children, but also may tend to offset the value of otherwise effective safety education. Preliminary inspection of school premises may be made through the cooperation of the local school and building inspection authorities. Additional assistance can usually be obtained from the local engineers or inspectors of casualty insurance companies.

Periodic inspections should be made by the school custodian. Properly supervised inspections by pupil safety com-

mittees will aid in finding unsafe conditions and will also serve as an effective teaching device.

In any inspection, special attention should be given to laboratories, shops, kitchens, and other work areas used for instruction purposes, and to play and recreational areas.

Playground and Public Recreational Areas

A periodic check of playground and other recreational equipment and the facilities provided for the protection of children at swimming pools and bathing beaches is usually warranted as part of the community child safety program.

Traffic Conditions

Frequent observations of traffic conditions on streets adjacent to schools and playgrounds, made by members of the parent-teachers association, neighborhood association, and automobile club, in coöperation with police authorities, will aid in determining unsafe conditions and in suggesting remedies. The use of schoolboy patrols, the installation of proper school stop signs, and the designation of play streets may effectively supplement the activities of the police at these locations.

The determination of safest routes for children to use in going to and from various residential areas and their respective schools, has proved a valuable means of controlling child accidents on the street and has also been used as an effective upper-grade safety educational project.

Press Publicity

Frequent references to the local child safety program and facts concerning the child accident problem of the community printed in the local press, will prove a valuable means of stimulating widespread interest and of encouraging additional activities. Such publicity might well include news items regarding vari-

ous activities of the child safety program, editorial comments, signed articles or endorsement (by prominent local people), weekly analyses of local child accidents, human interest stories of child accidents, question and answer contests, photographs, cartoons, etc.

Radio

The local radio station can contribute to the child safety campaign by utilizing national program material dealing with child safety, and by arranging for special programs over the local station. These special programs might include the broadcasting of local addresses on child safety, the presentation of locally developed skits, spot announcements, interviews with prominent citizens interested in child safety, etc.

Safety Education in Schools

A continuous and effective safety program, conducted as a part of the regular school curriculum, will prove one of the most important phases of the local child safety activities. Such a program should seek to develop safe practices on the part of students and to encourage a sense of responsibility of the older-age children for the safety of the younger ones.

The integration of safety material into the health educational activities of the schools and into permanent regular curricular subjects, has usually proved most effective, particularly when proper consideration has been given to child growth and development. To accomplish these aims teachers should be supplied with proper teaching aids including current data on the local child accident situation.

The organization of school safety councils or committees among the pupils to investigate accidents, develop school safety rules, organize school safety patrols, and suggest safe routes to and from school, has proved of value in many schools. Courses in vocational training provide outstanding opportuni-

ties to incorporate child safety education as a means of protecting the child at school and of developing future safe workers. The introduction of driver training courses in the upper classes of the high school provides an additional direct means of child safety education.

Supplemental Safety Education

Red Cross chapters in many communities are in a position, through their First Aid and Accident Prevention activities, to present home safety courses for adults and junior safety courses for organized groups of children.

Meetings and Addresses

The effectiveness of the local child safety program can always be increased through the use of the spoken word. The regular meetings of local civic, service, patriotic, fraternal, neighborhood, parents, and women's groups provide an opportunity to introduce the child safety theme through scheduled addresses by competent individuals interested in the various phases of the problem. Arrangements can also frequently be made to have speakers appear before religious bodies, or material can be furnished to the religious leaders for their own use. Skits and demonstrations on child safety can be used effectively at these meetings.

To take full advantage of this method of reaching the public, a speakers bureau may be desirable.

Exhibits and Demonstrations

Exhibits of safe toys, safe nursery equipment, and other materials pertaining to child safety usually provide an

effective means of instructing the public and of stimulating widespread community interest. Such exhibits may be used at organization meetings and may be displayed in store windows or other public places where they will be seen by large groups. Local merchants may be interested in developing and arranging for the display of such exhibit material. To stimulate community-wide interest in this project a contest might be conducted to determine the most effective and constructive exhibit displayed during a specified period. For example, a safe toy exhibit displayed in various store windows during the first week or two of the Christmas buying season, may prove of considerable value.

Distribution of Material

Effective material, booklets, leaflets, hand dodgers, etc., pertaining to child safety, distributed directly to homes, will aid materially in informing the public of the seriousness of the child accident problem and of means of preventing such accidents. In addition to material of this nature, which may be obtained from national or state agencies, locally prepared material can be used effectively. Various methods have been used for distributing material. For example, it has been furnished to children in the schools to take home to their parents; it has been enclosed with the bills of public service organizations, stores, etc.; and has been given house-to-house distribution by local representatives of insurance companies. It has also been used effectively as a teaching device by public health nurses.

SUGGESTED PLAN OF ORGANIZATION FOR A COMMUNITY CHILD SAFETY PROGRAM

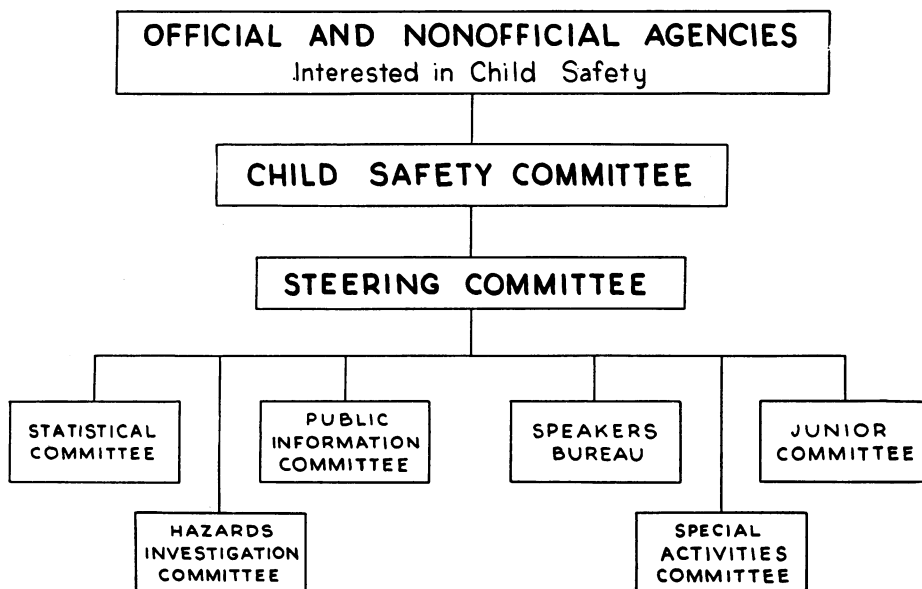
In order to plan and conduct an effective community-wide child safety program coordinating the activities of interested agencies, a definite plan of approach is desirable. The following committee structure is suggested for con-

sideration and adaptation to the needs of your community.

CHILD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Membership—Appointed representatives of each interested and cooperating agency (see list

SUGGESTED ORGANIZATION CHART



of official and nonofficial agencies in the early part of this paper).

Functions—

To study the local child accident problem.

To plan and carry out an effective preventive program by coordinating the activities of cooperating agencies.

To appoint and guide necessary special committees or subcommittees to carry out effectively the coordinated child safety program.

EXECUTIVE OR STEERING COMMITTEE

*Membership—*Chairman of each special committee or subcommittee and such additional members as may seem desirable.

Functions—

To conduct an inventory of cooperating agencies (see early part of this paper).

To develop the overall policy to be followed in the child safety program.

To review the reports and recommendations of subcommittees before presentation to the Child Safety Committee for adoption and action.

To represent the Child Safety Committee in the interim between meetings.

STATISTICAL OR FACT FINDING COMMITTEE

Functions—

To collect and analyze available data per-

taining to the child accident experience of the community.

To plan and conduct such studies, surveys, house-to-house interviews, etc., as may be necessary to obtain statistical facts and case examples of nonfatal disabling accidents to children.

To interpret factual data for the use of the Public Information Committee and for the use of cooperating agencies in planning their preventive activities.

HAZARD INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE

Functions—

To develop a continuing plan for the investigation and reporting of physical conditions affecting child safety in the community.

To organize and train volunteer workers, representatives of coordinating organizations, and other interested individuals, to make investigations and offer recommendations.

To develop an effective method of following up and obtaining action on recommendations resulting from investigations.

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE

Functions—

To collect and review available publications on child safety including pertinent material on child growth and development.

To prepare and furnish material pertaining

particularly to the local child safety problem, to the local press, local radio stations, speakers bureau, school authorities, and other coöperating agencies.

To plan and arrange for the conduct of child safety training courses for professional leaders, parents, and older-age children.

To arrange for the proper local distribution of effective child safety material.

SPEAKERS BUREAU

Functions—

To prepare a list of individuals who are willing and capable of accepting speaking assignments.

To secure engagements for these speakers.

To furnish material provided by the Public Information Committee, for the use of the speakers.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Functions—

To plan and develop such special activities as may be deemed desirable in order effectively to keep the child safety problem before the public.

JUNIOR COMMITTEE

Membership—Representatives of the local Youth Council and of school student councils. If deemed desirable two junior committees might be organized—one on the grade school level and the other on the high school level.

Functions—

To plan, organize, and conduct youth and

student participation in such pertinent activities of the Child Safety Committee as the investigation of accidents and child hazards, the development of school safety councils and patrols, the preparation of material for the Public Information Committee, and the acceptance of speaking assignments as requested by the Speakers Bureau.

SUMMARY

At the present time, accidents are the first cause of child deaths and an outstanding cause of child morbidity in this country. The reduction of child accidents during the past fifteen years has by no means approached the marked reduction of child mortality and morbidity due to disease. Accordingly, child accidents represent a major child health problem requiring further study and research and the more effective utilization of present knowledge regarding prevention and control.

The seriousness of the child accident problem presents a definite challenge to responsible public health agencies for the initiation and conduct of well organized community programs planned to coördinate the activities of all local official and nonofficial agencies interested in child safety.