

Survey of Residential Swimming Pools Assessed by Florida County Property Appraisers, Summer 2006

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Background

Florida has the highest drowning death rate in the nation for children under age 5.¹ Over 60% of these drowning deaths occur in residential swimming pools every year.² Lapses in adult supervision and lack of pool safety features as mandated in the Preston de Ibern/McKenzie Merriam Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act (Florida Statutes, Chapter 515) have been identified as contributing to these needless and preventable tragedies. In 2005, there were 50 reported drowning deaths of children under age 5 in residential swimming pools in Florida.² While this number may seem inconsequential, there are also an unknown number of near-drowning incidents that occur in swimming pools every year. Residential swimming pools thus pose a significant drowning hazard for children in this age group in Florida. However, current estimates of the number of residential swimming pools that exist in Florida have not been readily available. Therefore, during the summer of 2006, the Florida Department of Health, Office of Injury Prevention conducted a survey of residential swimming pools in Florida by contacting county property appraisers' offices to determine the number of pools that they currently assess for property taxes.

Methods

Contact was initially made by e-mail in June 2006 to all 67 Florida county property appraisers' offices. One month later, in July 2006, a letter was sent by mail to counties that had not responded. Two months later, in August 2006, a phone call was made to counties that still had not responded. Two items were requested from each county: the total (cumulative) number of private residential swimming pools that have been assessed in that county to date, and the number or percent of new residential swimming pools that have been assessed in that county since October 1, 2000, when the state's Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act went into effect. All correspondence from county property appraisers' offices were filed in alphabetical order in a binder for future reference. Data was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and statewide totals calculated.

Results

During the three-month data collection period, 61 of Florida's 67 counties responded, for a response rate of 91%. Sixty counties reported a grand total of 1,095,347 pools that they currently assess (see attached table). Taylor County responded but did not have data available to report. The number of new pools assessed since October 1, 2000, and are thus subject to the Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act, is 225,987, reported from 49 of the 61 counties that responded. Six counties were unable to report the number of new pools that they have assessed since October 1, 2000. Dixie, Hamilton, Highlands, Suwannee, Union, and Walton counties did not respond at all. However, these are thinly populated rural counties that are not expected to have added significantly to the approximately 1.1 million total residential swimming pools estimated to exist currently in Florida from this survey.

Discussion

Two limitations should be noted in estimating the number of residential swimming pools in Florida from property tax assessment data. However, several county property appraisers' offices have indicated that this data is more reliable than construction permit data, as many pools are unpermitted. First, only permanent, in-ground pools are included in this data, which excludes above-ground pools and other temporary pools in which drownings are known to have occurred in Florida², and public pools. However, drowning deaths in public pools have not been specifically documented in Florida death certificate records.² Second, some counties reported the number of new pools that they have assessed since January 1, 2000, or January 1, 2001, instead of October 1, 2000, since January 1 is the date that property assessments are made every year. Some misclassification error therefore exists in the estimate of the number of new pools that have been built in the state since October 1, 2000. Future updates to this data should take the January 1 assessment date into consideration when determining the number of pools in the state that are subject to the Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act.

References

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), 1999-2003. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars>.

² Florida Department of Health, Office of Vital Statistics. Florida Death Certificate Database, 1999-2006.

Acknowledgements

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**Survey of Private Residential Swimming Pools
Assessed in Florida, By County, Tax Year 2006**

County	Total	Assessed Since October 1, 2000*
Alachua	6,996	1,214
Baker	408	100
Bay	7,936	5,722
Bradford	378	42
Brevard	43,153	6,818
Broward	113,157	19,139
Calhoun	169	119
Charlotte	25,334	4,497
Citrus	12,775	3,968
Clay	8,213	1,699
Collier	34,854	11,478
Columbia	1,097	237
DeSoto	764	N/A
Dixie	N/A	N/A
Duval	23,226	4,332
Escambia	9,085	N/A
Flagler	9,112	3,925
Franklin	394	138
Gadsden	491	N/A
Gilchrist	211	69
Glades	145	44
Gulf	207	N/A
Hamilton	N/A	N/A
Hardee	321	25
Hendry	566	75
Hernando	18,932	3,992
Highlands	N/A	N/A
Hillsborough	71,960	13,958
Holmes	213	12
Indian River	12,018	3,379
Jackson	766	N/A
Jefferson	344	114
Lafayette	87	20
Lake	14,089	6,984

County	Total	Assessed Since October 1, 2000*
Lee	62,481	19,141
Leon	7,712	N/A
Levy	774	N/A
Liberty	88	11
Madison	194	24
Manatee	26,246	8,717
Marion	13,077	3,569
Martin	16,478	3,845
Miami-Dade	76,477	7,538
Monroe	4,668	1,505
Nassau	2,880	N/A
Okaloosa	11,008	3,122
Okeechobee	689	129
Orange	61,096	14,145
Osceola	18,943	4,542
Palm Beach	101,463	15,885
Pasco	29,760	8,810
Pinellas	65,505	N/A
Polk	29,291	8,847
Putnam	1,247	384
Saint Johns	9,951	3,645
Saint Lucie	18,301	4,598
Santa Rosa	6,512	2,148
Sarasota	45,000	10,700
Seminole	38,086	6,551
Sumter	1,692**	N/A
Suwannee	N/A	N/A
Taylor	N/A	N/A
Union	N/A	N/A
Volusia	27,622	5,888
Wakulla	448	143
Walton	N/A	N/A
Washington	257	N/A
FLORIDA	1,093,655	225,987

* The Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act (Florida Statutes, Chapter 515) went into effect on this date for all new residential swimming pools built in Florida, but some counties reported the number of pools assessed since January 1, 2000, or January 1, 2001.

** Includes both residential and commercial pools.

Data Source: Florida County Property Appraisers' Offices.
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