

# Young lives at risk

8000 cars have been confiscated

## Battle to introduce pool law

Sarah Vogler

THE lives of young children are being put at risk around swimming pools because of a disagreement over a new national pool fencing standard.

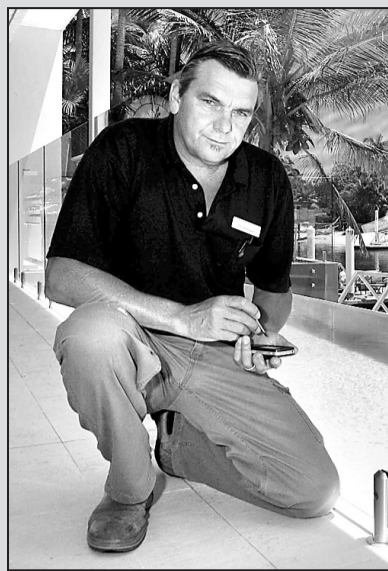
The Australian Building Code Board (ABCB) has been accused by safety experts of refusing to add a new Australian Standard — which does not permit access to a pool through a doorway from the house — into the building code.

The new standard calls for pools to be surrounded on all four sides by a fence, as opposed to allowing a property wall to form one side of the enclosure, as permitted under current laws.

Studies have shown children are 11 times more likely to drown in a pool with a three-sided fence plus house access.

Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit director Dr Rob Pitt said three-sided fencing was still being approved because the building code does not totally ban it.

"We succeeded in having it (the section allowing door access in a three-sided fence)



COMMON FAILURES: Phil Montague inspects a pool

## Audit of endless regrets

Lou Robson

RETIRED policeman Phil Montague has seen it all before.

A lifeless body pulled from a backyard pool, grieving parents and a sense of guilt and remorse that never ends.

"Losing a child to a pool drowning is something most couples don't survive," said Mr Montague, who is now the Sunshine Coast Regional Council's northern region pool inspector.

For two years the 51-year-old has travelled the region between Peregian Beach and Noosa auditing the safety equipment of Sunshine Coast pools.

Armed with a tape measure, camera and lengthy checklist, he spends hours thoroughly inspecting pool fences, gates and locks.

The most common reasons that pools



fail to meet safety standards surface over and over again. He lists them: gates not closing properly or constantly left open; no CPR chart; objects too close to the pool fencing; and lack of fence maintenance (mostly rotten or missing palings).

The solo inspector audits around 200 pools every three months as part of a rolling pool inspection system.

"For each 200 pools I'd probably see three or four fines and up to 70 enforcement notices," he said.

removed from the body of the standard and relegated to the appendix," Dr Pitt said.

"It would be a very brave local authority that allowed someone to put in a pool relying upon an appendix.

"It's about trying to limit or even get rid of the ability to have a door leading from the house area to the pool area."

The revelation that the new standard is being ignored comes as *The Sunday Mail* continues to increase aware-

ness about pool safety through our Safe Summer campaign.

The latest standard was published towards the end of last year, and Dr Pitt said it was considered to be the "gold standard" in safety.

A year later, the new standard has still not been included in the building code, he said.

"ABCB has been blocking it actively. ABCB is definitely putting lives at risk with this stance," Dr Pitt said.

He said criticism of the

standard was that it would be costly, but a recent report into the new code by the New South Wales Department of Government found it was not.

He said that initially, the resistance came from the pool industry which feared that insisting on four-sided pool fencing would discourage people from putting in pools close to their house.

"After a decade everyone agreed, and then you turn round and it's the actual build-

ing codes that are the problem and the blockage," he said.

"It's not only frustrating, it's dangerous. It's costing children's lives and they should be held accountable."

Dr Pitt said the new Australian Standard was also easier to understand, and therefore much more accessible than the old standard.

The *Sunday Mail* contacted the ABCB for comment but they did not return calls.

[voglersa@qnp.newsltd.com.au](mailto:voglersa@qnp.newsltd.com.au)

Kay Dibben

EIGHT thousand cars driven by hooners and repeat offenders have been confiscated in Queensland.

Police Minister Judy Spence said thousands more offenders were one step away from having their vehicles seized.

Those who have been convicted of unlicensed or disqualified driving, high-end drink-driving or driving unregistered or uninsured vehicles face 48 hours' impoundment if they commit a repeat offence within three years.

The state's anti-hooning laws were introduced in late 2002 to curb street-racing, speed trials and drivers performing burnouts.

More than 5000 cars have been confiscated under those laws, and almost 3000 under the laws aimed at serious repeat offenders.

"These results show the Government's tough vehicle confiscation laws are being felt by offenders," Ms Spence said.

For hooning offences, drivers have vehicles confiscated for 48 hours. Subsequent offences can lead to three months' or permanent confiscation. Under the repeat driving offences laws, a first repeat offence can result in 48 hours' confiscation, a second can lead to a three-month confiscation and drivers can lose their cars permanently after a third.



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