

Rainwater tanks pose risk for toddlers

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An increase in household rainwater tanks due to the severe drought and accompanying water restrictions across Australia is creating a new hazard for parents of young children.

University of Adelaide paediatric forensic pathologist Professor Roger Byard says rainwater tanks pose a serious drowning risk for toddlers, with at least three fatalities being recorded in recent years.

"In each case, the children fell through the access cover of the rainwater tank and drowned within minutes," Professor Byard says.

In a paper published in this month's Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine, Professor Byard calls for more stringent controls to ensure secure child-proof access points are installed in rainwater tanks.

"Young children are insatiably curious and enjoy exploring their environment. Their lack of appreciation of any danger, compounded by their inability to swim and their failure to call out for help can be a recipe for disaster.

"As rainwater tanks are now becoming more common in Australia, the risk of accidents involving children will inevitably increase. It is crucial that we highlight the potential dangers for young children and ensure the tanks are properly secured."

Professor Byard says ladders and other access points - including trees, shrubs, timber and trellises - should not be left next to rainwater tanks,

and secure childproof lids need to be installed.

The forensic pathologist's recommendations follow a case study of the drowning of 2-year-old twin children in the Adelaide Hills in 2006 and a three-year-old boy in Queensland.

Professor Byard works in the Discipline of Pathology at the University of Adelaide.

His paper, *Rainwater Tank Drowning*, can be viewed at www.sciencedirect.com

Provided by University of Adelaide

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