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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 28, 2011

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**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH URGES FLORIDIANS AND VISITORS TO
DESIGNATE A “WATER WATCHER” FOR SUMMER SAFETY**

- Mix safety with fun this July 4th and all summer long -

OKALOOSA COUNTY – With pool time already here and Fourth of July festivities right around the corner, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) asks Floridians and visitors to save a life and designate a “water watcher” when children are participating in water activities. Pool safety is a serious subject and must be made a top priority.

“Water watchers” can wear a water watcher designation tag as a visual reminder to responsible individuals that they are present to monitor children in or around water.

Throughout the late 1980s and late 1990s, Okaloosa County averaged zero to one drowning deaths for children between the ages of one and four. For the past decade, with an increasing number of residential pools in the county, Okaloosa has averaged two to three drownings per year for this age group. Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury deaths for Okaloosa’s one to four year olds, and the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for infants (less than one year), and children ages five to nine years.

“In Florida, we lose four classrooms of Pre-K children every year to drowning,” says Lisa Vanderwerf-Hourigan, Director of the Office of Injury Prevention at DOH. “By designating a water watcher, you can ensure you have the proper supervision for children in or around water.”

Three layers of pool safety will help keep children who are swimming safe on the 4th of July and year-round:

- **Layer 1- Supervision:** Children should never be allowed in the pool area without an adult responsible for supervision. Supervision is the most critical layer of protection. Designate a water watcher (download a water watcher tag from <http://waterprooffl.com>), so you know who is in charge of watching children in pool.
- **Layer 2- Barriers:** A barrier is an object or device that physically blocks children from entering the pool area. DOH recommends using a number of different barriers to ensure safety: for your home, child-proof locks and door alarms on all doors that open to the outside; and for the pool area, a fence with a self-closing and self-latching gate, and gate and pool alarms. The Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act (Chapter 515, Florida Statutes) requires at least one physical barrier for pools built after 2000. More than 90 percent of Florida’s home swimming pools were built before the law.
- **Layer 3- Emergency Preparedness:** Always be prepared for an emergency. Learn life-saving skills, know proper emergency procedures and keep a phone near the pool in case you need to call 911. Many organizations offer Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and rescue-technique classes at little or no cost. Finally, ask your health care provider about age-appropriate swimming lessons in your area.



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Prevention Tips:

- Install four-sided isolation fencing with a self-closing and self-latching gate around pools and spas.
- Install alarms on all doors and windows leading to the pool.
- Learn to swim and never swim alone or while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Always wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD) while participating in open water sports and recreation.
- Operate watercraft safely and legally.
- Never dive into water less than nine feet deep. If you don't know the depth of the water, do not dive.
- Learn CPR.

Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Water-Related Injuries <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/index.html>
- National Drowning Prevention Alliance <http://www.ndpa.org>
- Consumer Product Safety Commission, Pool Safety <http://www.poolsafely.gov/>

To take the water watcher pledge, visit <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/injury/DrownPrevent.html#pledge>

For more information, including local and statewide [unintentional drowning death data](#) from Florida CHARTS, please visit the Drowning Prevention Awareness Campaign at <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/injury/DrownPrevent.html#awareness>.

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