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Entrapment Drowning in Pittsburgh Underscores Need to Follow New Federal Pool Safety Law

WASHINGTON, DC – June 12, 2009 – Tragic news from Pittsburgh today served as a chilling reminder that failure to comply with the requirements of the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act can have deadly consequences.

The June 11 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reported that a wrongful death lawsuit has been filed following the April 11, 2009 death of a 38 year-old father of two, who died as a result of an entrapment drowning in a Pittsburgh hotel pool. Entrapment can occur when a swimmer becomes stuck over a drain due to its powerful suction force. The forces can exceed four hundred pounds of force, making it often impossible for victims to free themselves.

According to the suit, the pool did not have equipment installed to make it compliant with the federal Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act, which requires all public pools to make modifications that eliminate the risk of entrapment. The entrapment drowning in Pittsburgh took place nearly four months after the federal law went into effect.

“In her suit filed in Allegheny County Common Pleas Court, Ericka Williams said her husband was a good swimmer but drowned at about 7:30 p.m. in 10 feet of water after he became ‘entrapped in the suction of a swimming pool drain,’” the story reads.

The pool facility is now closed.

Since the law went into effect on December 19, 2008, the Pool Safety Council worked to raise awareness amongst public pool owners and operators around the country and encourage them to install the entrapment-preventing equipment required by the Pool and Spa Safety Act. Unfortunately, many states and localities have failed to enforce the law due to confusion over its requirements and perceived cost.

“What happened in Pittsburgh was a tragedy; our thoughts are with the victim’s family,” PSC spokesman John Procter said. “What’s equally tragic is that this could have been avoided through compliance with the federal law that requires the installation of devices that will make entrapment a thing of the past. This father’s death

underscores the need for public safety officials around the country actively promote implementation of the Pool and Spa Safety Act before we learn of yet another reminder of the dangers of pool drain entrapment.”

While the majority of entrapment-related injuries and deaths are amongst children, the death of a healthy, 38 year-old man illustrates the powerful drain suction forces that can exist in pools that have not been modified with approved anti-entrapment devices.

The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act is named after the granddaughter of former Secretary of State James Baker, who died in an entrapment accident in 2002. The law stipulates that before opening this year, all public pools and spas must to be outfitted with approved safety drain covers. Single drain pools and spas must be outfitted with an approved anti-entrapment device, such as a safety vacuum release system. The Pool Safety Council recommends the installation layers of protection in all pools, including the use of approved anti-entrapment drain covers, as well as other approved systems or devices.

Additional information can be found on the Pool Safety Council’s website at www.poolsafetycouncil.org or on the Consumer Product Safety Commission’s pool safety website at: www.poolsafety.gov

PSC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the prevention of child drowning nationwide. For additional information, including guidance on Pool and Spa Safety Act guidance requirements, please visit our website at: www.poolsafetycouncil.org.