



Pool Arrest Highlights Drain Dangers

A Dangerous Suction Effect Can Be Caused by Unsafe Pool Drain Covers

By KYLE GASSIOTT and ASA ESLOCKER

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Safety experts say yesterday's arrest of a pool contractor in Connecticut could pressure many pool owners and operators to make their pools safer. Of particular concern are dangerous pool drain covers which can cause a powerful suction effect and have caused hundreds of injuries and over 30 drownings of children since the 1980s. Dangerous pool drains are the subject of an ongoing ABC News investigation which will air Wednesday on "Good Morning America."

"This is the first time a swimming pool contractor has been arrested in the United States for violating the building and safety codes concerning swimming pools. As a result of this arrest we are anticipating that many pools will now be made safe and compliant," Paul Pennington, spokesman for the Pool Safety Consortium, told ABC News.

David Lionetti was arrested yesterday on a manslaughter charge in the death of Zachary Cohn. Six-year-old Cohn drowned last summer after becoming trapped by the suction of a drain in his family's pool in Greenwich, Conn. The pool had been installed by Lionetti's company Shoreline Pools.

Parents Brian and Karen Cohn filed a civil suit against Lionetti in January claiming Shoreline Pools should have known of the dangers of a potentially fatal entrapment from an uncovered suction drain.

"Nothing will bring our son back, but we hope this prosecution will help prevent another horrific incident like this from happening to someone else," said a statement by the Cohns released by their attorney. "Those who knowingly violate pool safety codes designed to protect children should be held accountable for their actions."

Lionetti voluntarily surrendered yesterday to the Greenwich Police Department and was released on \$25,000 bail pending a court appearance on July 28. In issuing the warrant for Lionetti's arrest, law enforcement officials state that he failed to have his company install mandated safety devices in the Cohn family pool. As a result Zachary Cohn was able to remove the cover and was caught in the suction power of the drain. His parents were unable to free him before he drowned.

Pennington, who is also the President of Vac-Alert which manufactures a pool safety release system, says he believes the legally mandated devices, including a safety release system, would have saved Zachary's life.

"The Connecticut building code outlines the layers of safety and Mr. Lionetti purposefully chose to ignore these layers of protection, primarily the safety vacuum release system which would have freed Zachary in less than a second," Pennington said.

Richard Meehan Jr., attorney for Lionetti told the Associated Press, "To my knowledge this is the first time an executive from a pool company has been prosecuted for homicide for claimed

code violations in the installation of a pool." The AP also reported that Lionetti plans to plead not guilty.

While only 50 cases of entrapment deaths have been reported since the 1980s, pool safety experts believe the numbers could be much higher as many police and medical records do not list the specific cause of drowning.

The concern over dangerous drains led to the passage of the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act signed into law by President Bush in December of 2007. The act specifies that all swimming pool and spa drain covers available for purchase in the United States be compliant with new drains which will prevent or lessen the chances of entrapment.

The act requires that public pools be equipped with one of three approved drain covers or an entrapment prevention system accepted by the Consumer Products Safety Commission by December 19, 2008 or the next time the pool is open for public use.

Safety expert Allan Korn of Safe Kids Worldwide said pool contractors around the country should view the arrest as a call to build not only beautiful pools but safe pools.

"Any time a child dies it's a horrible event, but this is a particularly horrific way to die," said Korn.

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