

Safety of Doggie Doors Questioned

Advocacy website launches to raise awareness of potential dangers of pet doors.

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A mother in Orlando, Fla., wants to get the word out about the risks that pet access doors, or doggie doors, might pose to children. Carol Ranfone has launched a new advocacy website to raise awareness of the potential dangers of pet doors and to push for change in the industry.

Through PetAccessDangers.org, Ranfone hopes to help other parents avoid injury or death in their family. Her son, Matthew, was 2 years old when he slipped out of the home through the doggie door and made his way into the backyard pool. He died 13 days later from injuries sustained in the near drowning.

It is estimated that in the past decade more than 100 children nationwide have drowned, nearly drowned or been injured, after leaving the home through a pet door, according to new research. Ranfone and her family have been working to inform the public about the hidden dangers associated with pet doors and to ensure that the products are made safer.

Pet door-related drowning incidents have been identified through news stories, public health specialists, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and coroners or medical examiners. Through her site, which debuts during National Water Safety Month in May, Ranfone hopes to make more people aware of how children can drown, get lost, wander into streets or otherwise become seriously hurt or killed after exiting a home through a pet door.

The next step is to advocate change in the way these products are made, such as providing warning labels. "Matthew didn't have a chance to grow up," Ranfone said, "but we hope that our advocacy will keep other children out of harm's way."