Unintentional Drowning: Toddlers in dams

Child Safe Play Area Program
Final Report
August 2005

A Victorian Government initiative
Acknowledgements

The following individuals and organisations are acknowledged for their cooperation and participation in this project.

- Northern District Community Health Services
- Boort Maternal Child Health Centre
- Loddon Shire Council
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Nathalia and District Community Health
- Trentham Community Health
- Glenelg Outreach
- Hume North East Farm Safety Officer
- Monash University Accident & Research Centre
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia
- David Phillips – Farm Safe Alliance Manager
- Roslyn Lanyon – workshop facilitator

Contact Details

Victorian Farmers Federation
24 Collins St
Melbourne Vic 3000

Phone: (03) 9207-5503
Fax:   (03) 9207-5500
Email: cpearce@vff.org.au

Report Written By:
Roslyn Lanyon - Project Officer/Workshop Facilitator
Caroline Pearce - VFF, Project Officer

Published August 2005

This report is a product of the Child Safe Play Area Program, a program of Victorian Farmers Federation, with funding from the Department of Human Services
# Table Of Contents

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 4

1.1 Background
1.2 Objectives
1.3 Aims

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY ........................................................................ 6

2.1 Stage 1 Consultation
2.2 Stage 2 Collation and Evaluation of Data
2.3 Stage 3 Development of Pilot Program
2.4 Stage 4 Implementation of Pilot Program

SECTION 3: RESULTS AND FINDINGS .............................................................. 12

3.1 Part One
3.2 Part Two

SECTION 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS ............................................................. 26

SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS ................................................................. 29

Appendix 1 Workshop Participant Survey Form ............................................. 30
Appendix 2 Practical Solutions Document ..................................................... 34
Appendix 3 Farm Safety Play Area Design Form ........................................... 35
Appendix 4 Workshop Evaluation sheet ......................................................... 37
Appendix 5 Media Release ............................................................................ 39
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Farms are as varied and diverse as the families who run them. These differences create their own hazards and dangers. Likewise, Living and working on a farm create potential hazards for the children who live there.

On average, thirty children die on farms annually. Around 600 are hospitalized, and many more are treated at Emergency Departments and Doctor’s Surgeries. For children aged 0-4 years the most common cause of death is drowning - in dams, rivers and creeks. Accidents involving farm machinery and vehicles are also a major cause of concern.

Toddlers and small children are:

- Unpredictable.
- Oblivious to hazards and dangers.
- Small and hard to see, but can very quickly and quietly disappear.
- Often unable to swim, and lack any form of road sense.
- Not prone to heeding warnings or demands and are definitely not responsible for their own actions.

Research has shown that the best methods of prevention of child drowning on farms are active supervision and containment. So how do we keep young children safe from drowning? Some of the ways suggested through this project include;

1. Contain them in a secure, safe and interesting play area.
2. Actively supervise them at all times.
3. Cover or fence potential water hazards – dams, troughs etc.
4. Adopt safe driving and machinery operating practises.
5. Educate workers or those who regularly come onto the farm.
6. Learn first aid and CPR.

The State Government Department of Human Services released a report several years ago bon toddler drowning in dams, which contains a number of recommendations aimed at reducing the rate of drowning. The Victorian Farmers Federation in February 2004 submitted a funding application to The Department of Human Services in response to recommendations made in the Coroners report ‘Unintentional Drowning: Toddlers in Dams in Victoria 1989-2001.

The application stated that a program could be developed in conjunction with Farm Safety Action Officers with the goal of reducing the accidental drowning of toddlers in dams. The following report presents an analysis of these findings to determine whether the project was successful. A number of short term and long term recommendations are made for consideration along with a detailed methodology on how the project was implemented.

Objectives

The following objectives were outlined for the project:

1. To achieve a measurable improvement in awareness of how far a toddler or young child can travel in short amount of time and the hazards that could be encountered in this time.

2. To achieve a tangible outcome in the form of measurable increase in the number of “child safe areas” on properties containing dams.
**Aims**

The aim of the project was to produce an integrated strategy to achieve a measurable increase in the number of safe play areas, taking account the recommendations of the “Unintentional Drowning: Toddler in Dams in Victoria 1989-2001 report.

Through the implementation of the pilot programme the following outcomes were promoted.

- To promote the concept of child safe area to young rural families
- To determine what communication strategies will be effective within rural communities to influence development of child safe play areas
- To determine support mechanisms required by families to assist in development of child safe play areas
- To develop a simple implementation plan for families in the construction of a child safe area
SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

Stage 1: Consultation

In the project's initial stages it was imperative that linkages were developed with a range of key stakeholders to provide information on the project’s objectives and desired outcomes. Contact was made with a number of regional Community Health Services to facilitate this process.

Focus groups were coordinated throughout regional Victoria in order to obtain data that would provide direction for the pilot programme. Approximately 100 participants were involved with the focus groups. The focus group discussions addressed the following issues:

- Perception of ‘safe play areas’ as being effective in preventing toddler drowning in farm dams and watercourses.
- Increase awareness of the distance a toddler can travel in a short time.
- Determining whether safe play areas would be effective.
- Determining what barriers existed to safe play areas being adopted.
- The type of information provided to parents to raise awareness of toddlers drowning in farm dams and water courses?
- Effective mechanisms of raising awareness of this issue?
- What barriers prevented farmers/property owners from implementing safe play areas?
- Solutions to assist in removal of barriers in implementation of safe play area
- Gather baseline data on the % of farms, which currently have effective safe play areas.
- Define what we mean by a “Safe play Area”. (compare focus group participant’s expectations with the current Farmsafe Australia recommendations)

The focus groups were organised by contacting Community Health Centres in the following regions. Community Health staff supported the project enthusiastically and co-ordinated local focus groups, many of these were existing play groups. Participating groups in NE Victoria were from smaller communities and participants were there by invitation. Focus group discussions were held in the following areas:

- Terang Western Victoria
- Yarrawonga NE Victoria
- Rutherglen NE Victoria
- Wandong 50 km north of Melbourne
- Wooragee NE Victoria
- Willowgrove West Gippsland
- Millbrook near Ballarat
- Clunes Central Victoria

There was no selection process for focus group participants since the project team was looking for as much support and information as possible. Over a two month period 10 focus groups were held with 100 participants attending.

Surveys were distributed to all participants (refer to Appendix 1).
**Stage 2: Collation and Evaluation of Data**

The following information provides a snapshot of the findings, which have been incorporated into the development of the pilot programme. Further detail as to the results of the focus groups is presented in Section 3 (Results).

The following provides a snapshot of findings from the focus group surveys.

- 100% of participants indicated that facts, figures and personal testimonies would stimulate interest to develop child safe play areas.
- 100% of participants strongly endorsed the child safe play area as a prevention measure against toddler drowning.
- Participants agreed that valuable assistance to implement measures could include fact sheets/videos on how to construct safe play areas and financial assistance.
- All participants indicated that the main barriers for construction of safe play area are due to a lack of finance and/or time.

**Stage 3: Development of Pilot Program**

From the findings of the initial consultation and data collection the proposal for the pilot program was developed. The proposed pilot program would test the effectiveness of planned intervention measures to determine the most effective ways to gain a significant increase in the awareness of the risk to toddlers, knowledge of possible solutions and an increase in the number of safe play areas on rural properties.

A reference Committee was formed to review the proposal for the pilot programme and provide direction. The Terms of Reference for the Steering committee is featured below.

1. To provide guidance and feedback regarding the Child Safe Play Area Project proposal.
2. To assist with the refining of the Project. Discuss findings of previous work and established Child Safe Play Areas - barriers/problems.
3. To provide assistance in areas of expertise.
4. To hear and respect the diversity of views of committee members.
5. Establish Future Directions.

The Reference Committee were represented by the following organisations

- Nicola Rabot - Department of Human Services
- Caroline Pearce - Victorian Farmers Federation
- Belinda Matthews - Royal Life Saving Australia
- Dr Lesley Day - Monash University Accident and Research Centre
- Farm Safety Officers

A draft of the suggested pilot programme was scrutinized by all members of the committee.

In analysis of the initial findings it was decided that the pilot programme would consist of a series of four practical Child Safe Play Information workshops held in various regional areas within Victoria. The workshops were aimed at families that had toddlers - or children under the age of five on their farms, or visiting their farms. Parents, grandparents, relatives, friends, carers and interested others were invited to attend the session to obtain information on the why and how to construct a Child Safe Play Area.
The workshops included:

- General discussions which highlighted the need for creating a Child Safe Play Area on farm. Facts, figures and testimonials were cited to highlight the hazards that can be encountered by unsupervised infants/toddlers in the farming environment.

- Photographs of successful Child Safe Play Areas. Practical, simple and cost-effective ideas to make the area more appealing for the children.

- Examples of materials (including ranges of appropriate materials) and the method of construction were explained for the various types of fences and the alternatives. Costing and time estimations were also provided as were examples of Fencing materials, latches and hinges.

- PowerPoint Presentation – providing an overview of the workshop

- A resource kit for each attendee to take home, which included the following:
  - A Practical Solutions Document to offer ideas that provides potential solutions to dilemmas families may face when constructing or modifying their yard to create a Child Safe Play Area. (Appendix 2)
  - Planning Sheet. A practical sheet was provided so families could plan and explore the possibility of constructing a Child Safe Play Area on their farm. The planning sheet featured ‘choosing the right area, looking at the specifications of fences’ etc. These were supported by the use of the Farmsafe Safe Play Area Booklet. (Appendix 3)
  - Brochure that provided simple steps on how to build a child safe play area
  - Various information booklets/brochures on Child Safety from Farmsafe Australia, Royal Life Saving Society Australia.
**Stage 4: Implementation of Pilot Program**

**Re-establishment of links with key stakeholders**

Links were re-established with Maternal and Child Health Groups and Community Health Centres. These organisations are instrumental in disseminating information and providing support for young families that are willing to construct a Child Safe Play Area.

Over the period of the project strong partnerships have been formed with relevant Maternal and Child Health Centres and local Community Health Groups. The staff of these groups have been interviewed, consulted and have assisted in organising and advertising the sessions in each of the four areas.

Important partners included:
- Northern District Community Health Services
- Boort Maternal Child Health Centre
- Loddon Shire Council
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Nathalia and District Community Health
- Trentham Community Health
- Glenelg Outreach
- Hume North East Farm Safety Officer
- Monash University Accident & Research Centre
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia

**Determine Location, Venue & Dates for the information sessions**

The locations for the workshops were chosen by identifying those areas already involved with Part 1 of the project. The session dates were scheduled by the Community Health Centre, day. It was preferable that the days and times chosen would coincide when three year old children were at kinder so that they would not be present during the workshop. The Community Health Centres coordinated the catering and venue.

Maternal Child Health Centres were contacted, and invitations issued – as well as to Playgroups, Pre-schools, Schools, CWA, Rotary, newspaper advertisements, phone calls, personal invitations and other relevant means.

**Collation of Resource Kit**

**Development of “Child Safe Play Brochure”**

The Brochure provided practical solutions to the construction of a Child Safe Play Area, including tips on how to:

1. Fit/modify a self-closing, self-latching gate (examples, stockists, costs).
2. Install new fencing in parts of the yard to define the Child Safe Play Area.
3. Modify existing fences to make them more effective.

Information for the brochure was adapted from the Farmsafe Australia “Safe Play on Farms - A Resource Package’ Version 2. Photographs and Illustrations for brochure were obtained from Farmsafe and the Presenter Roslyn Lanyon.
**Development of PowerPoint Presentation**
The PowerPoint presentation was an instrumental tool in disseminating the workshop information in a sequential and illustrated way. The Presentation and associated notes provided most of the information presented at the workshop.

**Development of Evaluation Sheet**
The Evaluation Sheet was developed to evaluate the session – its strengths and weaknesses, the main farming practises and information about the brochure and design sheet that were developed specifically for the workshops. Completion of the evaluation sheet was voluntary and at the end of each session each participant was given the option of filling in an evaluation form. The evaluation forms highlighted the farming or rural enterprises that dominated the properties, and the gender of participants. The feedback forms were instrumental in evaluating the effectiveness of information sessions, and the publications produced to support the sessions.

**Development of a Practical Solutions Document.**
This sheet was developed and offered to participants who felt they needed solutions to a number of barriers that were identified in Part 1 of the project.

**Collation of Child Safety Promotional Material**
A request was made to Farmsafe Australia and Royal Life Saving Society of Australia to provide recent brochures/booklets and other promotional material on Child Safety.

These resource kits offered a practical and detailed resource for parents, grandparents and other interested people.

The Information Resource Kit included a copy of (attached):

*Farmsafe:*
- Safe Play Areas on Farms – A Resource Package
- Child Development and Risk Checklist
- Child Safety on Rural Properties – Safety checklist
- Get Going – Moving Kids Safely on Farms
- Faster Than a Speeding Bullet – Brochure
- Rules – Fridge magnet

*Royal Lifesaving:*
- Keep Watch – ABC for children aged 1 – 8 years
- Look at Me Daddy, Watch Me Mummy – Water Safety Brochure

*Child Safe Play Area Project*
- Design Sheet
- Create a Safe Play Area on Farms and Rural Properties – 3 Stage Brochure

**Collation of Fencing Materials/Demonstration Materials**
A variety of fencing samples were provided to show participants first hand the materials available. These materials were obtained from local suppliers and hardware stores.
The samples included:

- Chicken Wire Netting
- 12 mm Wire Mesh (Aviary Wire)
- Self-latching, self-closing gate (scale model)
- Magna-latch
- Slam catch
- Dog-clip, bell,
- Gate signs
- Area Ideas
- Seeds
- Idea Sheet

**Organisation of Child Care Reimbursement**

Child care reimbursement was organised for participants of the workshop. A formal register was established and provided to the Victorian Farmers Federation so that participants could receive reimbursement. The Victorian Farmers Federation developed a reimbursement claim form and participants were requested to complete this reimbursement claim form. A nominal amount of $15 per participating parent was provided.

**Advertising and Promotion of Workshops**

The workshops were advertised in local and regional newspapers. The Victorian Farmers Federation issued a press release a week prior to the first workshop commencing. The workshops were also publicised in the Victorian Farmers Federation Monthly Publication and Weekly Update. Flyers were also developed and distributed to each community health centre for promotion within their local area. Participants were personally invited in the form of a phone call or personal letter.

**Evaluation of Workshops**

An evaluation sheet was distributed at the end of the workshop to all participants. Results were collated and tabulated. Results are featured in Section C of this report. *(Appendix 4)*
PART 1 - FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS (Facilitator 1)

**QUANTITATIVE**

**Question 1**

*What kinds of information should be provided to farmers and people in rural areas to stimulate their interest/action?*

The response to this question adds to qualitative data, supporting the value of informing parents about the extent of child fatalities and injury.

**Personal testimonies about drowning and their impact on families**

Personal stories about the impact of toddler drowning are strongly supported as a way of stimulating action.
The concept of using someone with a high public profile to stimulate action has received ambivalent support. These results would not encourage any move towards this approach.

**Question 2**

*How would each of these prevention methods be viewed by farmers and rural property owners?*

Moderately high endorsement of this approach, some focus group participants reported filling in dams that were too close to the house.
**Question 3**

*What kinds of assistance could be provided to farmers and rural property owners to help them implement these measures?*

- **Fence the house yard (use self latching gates)**
  - Very strong endorsement has been given to the Safe Play Area concept by focus group participants.

- **Establish and maintain family rules**
  - Strong endorsement for using ‘rules’ for family members.

- **Fact sheets on how to construct a safe play area/ child Resistant fence**
  - Strong support for the development of information sheets.
Although people would obviously welcome financial support, the focus group discussions revealed the fact that many people with young children are under significant financial pressure. Financial assistance would help remove a barrier to action.

While less emphatically endorsed, some participants stated that such assistance would be very valuable as their partners were working 6 or 7 days / week.

Strong support is indicated for this concept. It may be difficult to carry out in practice, possibly a role for local government.
This a variation on the previous question, again indicating that people would find it helpful to look at the solutions others have implemented.

**Question 4**

*If you wanted to construct a safe play area on your property, what would cause you the greatest problems?*

Time is obviously a significant barrier to people intending to construct a safe play area.

Qualitative data from the focus groups also supports this.

Cost is also a significant barrier to action. This survey was undertaken without presenting costing to focus groups. It probably reflects the financial constraints parents of young children face as they often have significant mortgage payments.
Insufficient skills to implement the solutions

![Bar chart showing percentage of people with insufficient skills to implement solutions.]

**Question 5**

**Do you have a fence around the house on your property?**

85% of focus group participants reported having a fence around the house. The fences on properties where focus groups have been held have all been incomplete.

Not a widespread problem as many people feel confident in their ability to construct a fence. However it is a problem for some.
Question 6

After today's discussion, would you describe this as a safe play area?

The percentage of people describing the fenced yard around their house as a safe play area dropped from 85% to 45%.

This probably reflects the number of people who have a complete fence rather than a fence approaching the standard recommended by Farmsafe Australia.

QUALITATIVE

- As part of the initial project, funds were distributed to a select number of focus group participants to construct a child safe play area. The intent of this action was to gain information on the cost and amount of time needed to construct a safe play area. Four of these demonstration areas were commenced in the areas of Cobram, Rutherglen, Willow Grove and Clunes.

- Five months after offering to fund the purchase of materials for the Safe Play Areas the work had not commenced. While the numbers are possibly too small to be significant, it is nevertheless a serious concern that there may be barriers to the construction of Safe Play Areas that have not been identified and is further discussed in Section 4.

- In one case there were ‘family issues’ as other family members had an input into expenditure on assets on the property.

- It can be reasonably concluded that the delays in commencing the work were due to a perception of a lack of urgency by those most capable of commencing the work. Fathers of the children often had other priorities and delayed commencing work on the Safe Play Areas due to work, farming or other commitments.

Costs.

- Constructing a Safe Play Area is an expensive undertaking. Some quotes obtained from contractors were up to $5000.00 and the assumption for many has been that it is likely that material costs will range from $1000 to $2000. In the second stage of the project this was proven to be a false indication, as many areas had the ability to be modified for a very moderate cost.
**Time involved**

- There can be a lot of work involved in the construction of a Safe Play Area. This is a potential barrier when there is limited amount of time available to be allocated to this task and also a risk that the work will be delayed or not finished. As part of this project, practical solutions were offered in the ‘Practical Solutions Document’.

- Parents are unaware of the range of fencing material available as their local farm supply or hardware store carries a limited range. (particularly the case where 80cm high wire netting was used on a fence when 105 cm or 120 cm could have been ordered at little extra cost).

- Lack of time to complete such a fence was cited as problem at most focus groups.

- In some instances one farmer had not had a day off for 6 months; partners regularly worked 6 days a week leaving little time to work on tasks such as a safe play area. Practical solutions were offered in the ‘Practical Solutions Document’.

- Cost is more of an issue in some areas than others. The dairy industry has been going through a particularly difficult time, and also smaller farms with limited cash flow and people establishing an enterprise indicated cost was a major barrier.

- These people would welcome some assistance to construct a safe play area, but said that such support would need to be significant ‘not a token gesture’.

- Low access to child care was raised regularly. It is often difficult to access day care even close to major centres.

- Strong support was evident for cost effective CPR training and annual updates.

- Older children open gates and leave them open was a commonly reported issue.

- Small children often follow the family dog under a fence.

- One lady reported that her husband left a job on one large farm he worked on because the house they lived in on the farm was close to large dam and there was not a suitable fence around the house.

- Grandparents need to be made aware of how quickly young children can move.

- Hobby farms / life style properties these often have dams in bush blocks for fire fighting purposes. These are usually not fenced and are often accessible to young children.

- Many parents have purchased sub optimal fencing materials because they did not know about the range of fencing materials available. The most common example of this is when houses have been fenced with 850 mm high, woven wire mesh (often called chicken wire). This mesh is available in 1050mm and 1200 mm rolls which are not a standard stock item in many rural stores, but these can be ordered by the stores and are readily available from wholesalers.
PART 2: CHILD SAFE PLAY AREA WORKSHOP EVALUATION (Facilitator 2)

QUANTITATIVE

Number of Participants: 55 people attended the four workshops.
Attendance at Rochester Farm Safety Expo - 20

A total of 106 Resource packages were distributed.
40 Kits were distributed at the Rochester Farm and Safety Expo

Participant Attendance

Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Response</th>
<th>Gender Present %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of Information Session participants were women. This may support the limitation of the project only offered in July, a late-sowing season.

Main enterprise

% Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Farming</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of the participants were involved in mixed farming or lived on rural or lifestyle properties. Many of the participants needs were similar, and all could identify with the major risk factors that created hazards to toddlers. There was ample time during the workshop to discuss specific needs of individuals.
The participants surveyed identified dams and water hazards as the main hazard facing toddlers. Machinery was the second area of concern with other identified areas having minor impact in the participants understanding. This data clearly shows the need for Child Safe Play Area on farms. Hazards do exist and are readily identified by participants.

**How would you rate your farm in relation to Child Safety?**

Many of the participants felt that the fences and gates were adequate. The majority were very comfortable with family rules. Although the figures indicated that they were reasonably happy with the state of their house yards, many indicated that there were many areas that were in need of major improvements - in fencing materials, self-closing/self-latching gates and interesting things to include in the area.
Half of participants recognised that toddlers could travel more than a significant distance in 15 minutes. This response supports the idea that parents are very aware of the capability of their toddlers to travel a significant distances in a short amount of time.

**Participants account:**

*Our 5 year old son when he was between 15-18 months, climbed out of his cot, pushed it to the door, climbed back into his cot - opened the door to his bedroom, climbed out of his cot - left his bedroom - went to the front security door, left the house. Ran down to Pakenham Road. This was all after his afternoon nap. The next day we put a lock on his bedroom door to stop him from getting out. He climbed out the window.*

*Some children will challenge all boundaries available. Bearing in mind this child was not yet 2 years old.*
Objective: To achieve an increase in the number of Child Safe Play Areas on rural properties\(^1\) containing dams.

Will you be willing to participate in three month follow-up to determine whether a child safe play area has been established on your farm?

![Follow-up calls bar chart]

The majority of participants who completed the survey were happy to participate in a follow-up phone-call in three months to ascertain whether there had been a change in attitude or actual physical result - construction or modification of a Child Safe Play Area.

It was decided that three months was a fair time span, and would allow work to happen in times when the farmers seasonally had more time.

**How helpful was the publication “Create a Safe Play Area on Farms & Rural Properties?”**

![Brochure response bar chart]

Initial attitudes toward the brochure were positive with a majority of the participants indicating that the publication was ‘very helpful’.

\(^1\) Farms or rural properties where children live or visit.
How helpful was the Design Sheet in reviewing/improving your Child Safe Play Area

![Bar Graph]

The Design Sheet was perceived as a ‘helpful’ tool when planning a Child Safe Play Area.

QUALITATIVE

The following provides some comment in regard to the publications and resource kits

Comments: Publication

Overall the brochure received some favourable comments. However there were some concerns that the print and pictures were too small. Over 60% found the three step brochure very useful.

Comments by Participants

“Great to take home and show the husband and older children”
“Great to show the husband and grandparents”.
“From what I can see they look excellent. Although I need to spend more time looking through them”.
“All the information I wanted about creating a safe play area for my son”
“I have taken a few more kits to give to parents on rural/farming properties that I will give our Service (Family Day Care).”
“Although basically stating common sense, very effective in making the obvious a priority.”
Good to have photos.
I found the Resource Package more useful for fencing ideas than the Brochure.
Feedback - Workshop

Co-organisers – Community Health Officers.

The feedback from the Community Health workers was very pleasing. All were very happy with the sessions and provided supportive feedback and encouragement about the workshop’s content and presentation. All commented on the PowerPoint Presentation and the useful resources and information that was provided.

Overall the workshop was well received by participants, the majority of participants thought that the workshops were thorough, informative and practical. Commenting on the visual aids and take home kits.

Participants Comments

“It was good to have the workshop run by a farming mum who has hands on experience”.
“Good to see someone enthusiastic sharing ideas to help keep our children safe”
“Very professional presentation, supported by great visual aids and take-home kit”
“Very well put together. I really liked the gardening ideas with children! 2 hours well spent”.
“The workshop was very helpful. We’ve just got quotes on fencing and I hadn’t thought of the self-closing hinges. Thanks.”
“Very helpful for taking in other people’s views.”
“Very good – all points were covered - good to see examples of fences.”
“Going back 7-8 years ago when we bought our first acreage property. We had no idea how dangerous a rural property was. Not to mention - how dangerous children under the age of 5 years are to themselves”

Comments, sections of interest:
The majority of participants indicated that the information on materials and fencing and child statistics options were of particular interest.

Participants Comments

“As we are building a new house, I found the safe yard interesting as we have new hazards.
The child accident statistics and just how quick they are was very interesting. “
“Risk factor listing. Very different to adult workplace safety.”
“Fencing and horrifying statistics ”
Fencing. We are about to put up a new fence to create a child safe area, and was particularly interested in the fencing alternatives and what to put inside.
SECTION 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

In reviewing the results of the pilot programme it was evident that there was a greater awareness of how far a toddler could travel in a short amount of time. The majority of participants were able to recognise that toddlers could travel more than a significant distance in 15 minutes. This response supports that parents are aware of the capability of their child. However, many highlighted the benefit of reinforcing the dangers. The ability for participants to reassess their environment on the farm and the main hazards facing toddlers was important. Approximately 50% of participants stated the dam and machinery as the main hazards facing toddlers. Overall 40-45% of participants indicated that major improvements were required in terms of fencing materials and self-closing/self-latching gates.

The second objective for this project was to achieve an increase in the number of Child Safe Play Areas on rural properties containing dams. Although the three month follow-up will ascertain whether there was a measurable increase in the number of child safe play areas on farms, it is clearly evident that attitudes to child safe play areas did change. This is supported by the majority of participants (90%) willing to participate in the three month follow up call. Participants stated that the three month time span was sufficient as the amount of time available is seasonally dependent. Statistics in relation to toddler drownings were crucial in making people understand the unpredictable nature of children and the hazards that are faced on farms or rural properties.

During the initial consultation with focus groups (Part 1) participants identified a number of barriers that prevented construction of a child safe play area. It was stated that time, money and minimal knowledge of materials required for construction was a main hindrance to establishing a child safe play area. The pilot programme aimed to remove these barriers, the workshops provided simple, practical information on how to construct Child Safe Play areas cost effectively with minimal effort. Solutions to these barriers were also addressed in the practical solutions document (Appendix 2).

A total of 55 participants attended the 4 workshop sessions (Part 2). The attendance figure was slightly lower than expected, although it is anticipated that all participants concluded the session with a positive attitude towards the safety of their children and the construction or modification of a Child Safe Play Area. Approximately 80% of attendees were female with less than 20% of males attending the sessions. The timing of the workshops requires further consideration.

Information sessions were conducted through the month of July. This was a particularly bad time for some as many farmers were busy trying to sow their crops - a late sowing season after the very dry conditions earlier in the year. The men that did attend acknowledged their availability was a result of the rain which kept them from their work. Drought was an issue to some prospective participant who decided not to attend due to the constraints of their budgets.

The weather also impacted on attendance of participants, with many young parents reluctant to bring small babies to sessions during winter. It would have been more favourable to conduct the sessions in autumn or spring, an ideal time to showcase an actual Safe Play Area. The ‘culture’ of farming families also impacted on the participation rate of the sessions. Many are of the opinion that ‘We didn’t need an area when we were growing up, so why start now?’ this is a hard obstacle to negotiate, with no quick-fix solutions and will require further consideration overtime.

The workshop co-ordination was governed by the previous community connections made in the first part of the project. This proved to be a limitation of the project. A closer partnership with Maternal Child Health Centres and Play Groups would have proven more beneficial to the project.
By far the most effective workshop attendance promotional method was personal invitation in the form of a phone call or personal letter.

Participants (65%) commented that the three step brochure and design sheet was very helpful, with 40% stating the brochure was helpful. Overall participants indicated the brochure was easy to read and simple to follow. Many female participants commented on the brochure as something to take home and show their husbands. Only a few participants commented on the font size and pictures being too small. The PowerPoint presentation was well received by participants as well as Community Health Coordinators. A copy of the presentation was distributed to all coordinators for future reference.

The workshop co-ordination was governed by the previous community connections made in the first part of the project. This proved to be a limitation of the project. A closer partnership with Maternal Child Health Centres and Play Groups would have proven more beneficial to the project. By far the most effective workshop attendance promotional method was personal invitation in the form of a phone call or personal letter.

Positive feedback was received from participants in regards to the resource kits, as it was something that they could take away with them for future reference. These kits include very succinct and relevant information for people with young children who have a vested interest in the safety of their children and growing families. Very few participants (only 3) had viewed any of the documents previously. These sessions had an added positive of getting the information and resources out at ‘ground-level,’ a wonderful achievement in itself.

In total 106 resource kits were distributed during the program. Each participant received a resource kit and additional kits were distributed to participants as there were numerous requests to hand them on to families and friends. People that were unable to attend the workshop had requested that any information presented in the session be forwarded to them. These kits contained vital resources and information to construct a well-appointed Child Safe Play Area. A number of the extra kits were provided as a resource for people involved in ‘Family Day Care’ on rural and farming

The majority of participants indicated that information on materials and fencing was of particular interest. Parents were unaware of the range of fencing materials available to them or the materials that will deter children from leaving the area. Stockists and types of materials; the ease of sourcing latches and hinges was also reinforced. Time and aesthetics barriers were also discussed with possible solutions or helpful hints to help resolve barriers. It was valuable to explore what stockists are available within the area prior to the workshop being conducted. The majority of participants found this information quite useful.

The popular, moderately resistant materials were found to be available locally and in many major hardware supply chain stores. Parents/carers were interested in the range of locks readily available from Rural Supplies and Hardware Stores. Lack of time still cited as a major problem in completing Child Safe Play Areas. As participants explored the range of materials it became obvious that a fenced area need not be a major financial burden, but readily within many budgets.

The ‘Interesting Things to do in the Area’ appealed to many participants as they sought ways to make the area appealing for their children encompassing at times varied age and developmental stages. Every play area on each farm/rural property is different. Owners of the property have different skill levels and would take varying time to construct a fence depending on the terrain, materials used and expertise of the fencer. Participants indicated that it is impossible to ascertain a cost and time frame for creating a Child Safe Play Area, as there are so many variables.
One of the barriers in collecting data in the previous part of the project was the inability for parents of young children to maintain constant attention while their babies/toddlers were present. To counteract this problem, a childcare rebate was offered for participants that attend the workshops, but there were no submissions to claim for this. This highlights the difficulty in gaining childcare places for rural children on an occasional care basis. The children were also very young, so parents were reluctant to leave them in childcare if places were available. The session was kept short, succinct and with plenty of time for questions. Play activities were also supplied for the older children present.

Overall the workshops were well received by participants and co-ordinators of community health centres. The majority of participants indicated that the workshops were practical, thorough and fun. The program received good media coverage. The Victorian Farmers Federation issued a media release when the program was launched (Appendix 5). As a result of this articles on the program were featured in regional newspapers. Both Deputy President of Victorian Farmers Federation and Ros Lanyon (Project Facilitator) were interviewed on ABC Radio – the country hour. The Victorian Farmers Federation featured an article in the organisation’s monthly magazine which has distribution figures of approximately 15,000.

As a direct result of this workshop a request was made for the project facilitator to present at the Rochester Farm Safety Expo in August 2005. Approximately 20 adults who had young children attended participated in the 30 minute presentation. The participants were keen to review the resources and provided with a resource package. Over 100 Primary School children also viewed the presentation and discussed farm safety and the dangers their young siblings and young relatives faced.
SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

In review of the results and findings of this program the following recommendations are made:

Short Term

- That there will be a follow-up phone call/email to those participants that agreed to determine if the Session had any impact on their attitudes to child safety, if the have completed any design/evaluation/planning of the area or indeed if any work or modifications have commenced/been completed on their Child Safe Play Area.

- That work continues with the Maternal Child Health Centres and Community health organisations to heighten the awareness of Toddler safety especially pertaining to water hazards.

- To avail workshops to all areas of the state, to reach a greater audience.

- To highlight the plight of the program by taking it to scheduled Field Days and Agricultural Shows. To reach to as many people on rural properties as possible.

- To continue to disseminate relevant documents and information to parents, carers, relatives and other interested parties. To provide people occupying rural properties with young children, or who have young children visiting their properties, the opportunity to access the resources that are available.

Long Term:

- Continue the program in a more organised and cost-effective manner. Use Maternal Child Health Centres, Community Health Organisations and Local Government to promote and run programs. (Local Government would fit this into their Municipal Health Plan – Early Childhood Plan).

- Provide Maternal Child Health Centres with the Resource Kits to give to new parents who live on a rural property, and highlight the hazards and risks.

- Adapt the day program to a ‘party plan’ safety night session.

- Run a Child Safe Play Area Expo on the properties of those Play Areas that were developed/modified by the Project. This would be best run on farm in spring. Extensive personal advertising and invitation proving to be the best way of encouraging participation.

- Re-convening and evaluating the focus groups of the first part of the project, and evaluating the progress of these groups.
Appendix 1

Workshop Participant Survey

Introduction:

300 individuals unintentionally drown each year in Australia.

Children 0-5 are one of the highest at risk groups. Dams and rivers are predominant locations of drowning for these children, children under 5 are drowned each year on Victorian farms and rural properties.

Research has shown that the best methods of prevention of child drowning on farms are:

1. Elimination of the hazards where these are not in use – eg unused water bodies, cover tanks/throughs etc
2. Fence the house yard to separate the farm workplace from the place where children live and play, with self latching gates – create a safe place to play. Fencing should be ‘child resistant’
3. Establish and maintain family and workplace rules relating to:
   • The boundaries where children can be without parental supervision
   • Ensuring the home yard gates are kept closed and maintained
   • Ensuring adequate adult supervision where children are in the vicinity of bodies of water, vehicles, machinery and of horses or other farm animals.

4. Adults on farms should be trained to undertake first aid including cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

These interventions should be established on all Australian farms where children are living or where children visit.
1. What would be the major barriers to farmers implementing these measures?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Rate 1-5 (1 very significant to 5 very insignificant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know that it is a problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to do it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested/don’t care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of recognition that the risk is high enough to do something about it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient skills to implement the solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not practical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to training/advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other – specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. How would each of these recommended prevention methods likely to be viewed by farmers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solutions</th>
<th>Rate 1-5</th>
<th>Rate 1-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = very practical</td>
<td>5 = very impractical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Elimination of the hazards not in use eg. Unused water bodies, cover tanks/ trough etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fence the house yard to separate the farm workplace from the place where children live and play, with self latching gates – create a safe place to play. Fencing should be ‘child resistant’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Establish and maintain family and workplace rules relating to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The boundaries where children can be without parental supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring the home yard gates are kept closed and maintained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring adequate adult supervision where children are in the vicinity of bodies of water, vehicles, machinery and of horses or other farm animals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adults on farms should be trained to undertake first aid including cardiopulmonary resuscitation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. What kinds of information should be provided to farmers to stimulate their interest/action?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information type</th>
<th>Rate 1-5, 1 = very helpful, 5 = not very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facts and figures about child drowning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal testimonies about drowning and their impact on farm families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies showing the benefits of implementing the measures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages from ‘respected personality’ (someone with high public profile)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. What kinds of assistance could be provided to farmers to help them implement these measures?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of assistance</th>
<th>Rate 1-5, 1 = very helpful, 5 = not very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheets on how to construct a safe play area/child resistant fence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts/rebates on constructing a safe play area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local contacts to do the work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration safe play areas can be visited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos showing case studies/demonstrating safe areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2:

### Practical Solutions

**Overcoming the barriers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not a Priority</strong></td>
<td>Make it one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify dangers to your children or visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wake up to the statistics and real life stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time - I don't have enough time</strong></td>
<td>Plan carefully – complete in quiet times well before needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time management – allocate time - make it a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get some help – grandparents, neighbour, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a working bee – barbeque &amp; fence day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set small goals and achieve a small task each time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erect temporary fencing until permanent fence is started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost – It’s too expensive</strong></td>
<td>Plan carefully – only purchase the materials you need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start small – fence a small area effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modify existing fences &amp; gates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Budget as part of the farm fencing program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recycle existing materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials - What do I buy?</strong></td>
<td>Use the information gained in workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use the Safe Play Area Resource Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talk to local suppliers, fencing contractors or dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source cheaper fencing options of similar quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modify existing fence with mesh or extension materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aesthetics - It isn't the look we want</strong></td>
<td>Plan carefully – look at your garden design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shrubs to hide fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Removable equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fence with low-impact visual fencing - chicken wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paint wire black – makes it almost invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use plants and shrubs to hide fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make it a temporary yard – while children are young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills – I don't have the skills</strong></td>
<td>Neighbour, relative, friend to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fencing contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working bee - with friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3:

Design Sheet

Don’t forget:

☼ Young children don’t enjoy a large garden, feeling more secure in a smaller area.
☼ Children don’t care what the garden looks like aesthetically.
☼ They can be destructive.
☼ Children need tough child-friendly plants.
☼ They have time to sit and ponder.
☼ Kids like water and mud.
☼ They have extraordinary tastes in weather - like rain, frost, wind and hail.
☼ Love trees - so plant one for each child.
Youth Children Like:
- Small area to play in
- Lawn
- Age appropriate toys and activities
- Things to eat
- Running, jumping, climbing, hiding, chasing
- Sensory & Tactile plants-to smell, taste, touch and see
- Interesting & unusual plants
- Autumn leaves
- Kid-friendly plants
- Close supervision and encouragement
Appendix 4:

Child Safe Play Area Information Session Evaluation

Name: (Optional)

_____________________________________________________

Female □ Male □

Type of farm/rural property (main enterprise)

________________________________________

How far do you think a toddler (0-5 years) could travel in 5 minutes?

___________________

On your farm/property, how close to the house and Child Safe Play Area is:

- The dam or any other open water (i.e. channel)_______________________________________
- Farm vehicles and machinery ____________________________________________

How does your farm/rural property rate?

Tick the box if the indicated factor is considered ‘safe’ and ‘adequate’, in your opinion.

- □ Fences
- □ Gate(s)
- □ Family Rules

Are you willing to receive a follow-up phone call in 3 months (October) to see how effective the Information Session has been in terms of your own Child Safe Play Area?

Yes □ No □
If yes, please state home phone contact number or email address.

_____________________________

Please take the time to rate the following publications in reviewing/improving your Child Safe Play Area?

**Create a Safe Play Area on Farms and Rural Properties**

- [ ] Very helpful
- [ ] Helpful
- [ ] Not very helpful

**Design Sheet**

- [ ] Very helpful
- [ ] Helpful
- [ ] Not very helpful

Would you like to comment about these publications?

Would you like to make an overall comment about the workshop?

Was there a section that was of particular interest?
Appendix 5:

EXAMPLE

1 July 2005

Child Safe Play Area Program launched

The Victorian Farmers Federation, in partnership with the Department of Human Services, have launched a Child Safe Play Area Program for people who have young children on their farms.

The program, which is part of an initiative funded by the DHS, has been designed to help reduce the number of toddler drowning in dams.

Free workshops will be piloted in Boort on 13 July, Drouin on 20 July, and Nathalia on 22 July and each session will cover the following:

- The need for a safe play area;
- Identification of dangers and hazards;
- Ways and appropriate materials to construct the area;
- Specifics on fences, latches and gates;
- Things to put in the area to keep it interesting; and
- Supervision techniques to keep users of the area completely safe.

VFF Social Policy Committee Chairman, Bill Whitehead, said farms are dangerous places for children.

“Thirty children die on farms annually, with around 600 are hospitalized and many more treated at Emergency Departments and doctor’s surgeries,” Mr Whitehead said.

“For children aged 0-4 years the most common cause of death is drowning - in dams, rivers and creeks. Accidents involving farm machinery and vehicles are also a major cause of concern.

“These sessions will be practical and informative and I urge all interested people to attend.”

To register your interest, contact Caroline Pearce at the VFF on 1300 882 833 or email cpearce@vff.org.au

Media Contact
Bill Whitehead
VFF Social Policy Committee Chairman
0428 550 533

Sally Brown
VFF Communications Advisor
1300 882 833.