



**For Immediate Release:**  
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## Drowning Prevention Campaign Launched

### *OCTA Bus PSAs Highlight Effort to Save Lives*

**Irvine, Calif.** – Members of a countywide task force and parents who lost children in drowning incidents, have launched a summer media campaign aimed at preventing future tragedies. An Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) bus, wrapped with a giant public service announcement, provided the backdrop for the group’s announcement today at the William Woollett Jr. Aquatics Center in Irvine.

“Always watch your child around water”, said Al Murray, chairman of the Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention and a Tustin councilman. “Designate a water watcher to maintain active adult supervision when your child is around water, use multiple barriers to block access to a pool or spa, and enroll your child in swim lessons and learn how to administer CPR. These are important safety steps that will save lives.”

Formed in August of 2015, the Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention is a 25-member advisory panel that includes the heads of countywide public health, public safety, government, non-profit organizations, parents of victims, and Olympic medal-winning swimmers. It was convened in August 2015 to develop recommendations on methods and strategies to reduce drowning incidents and fatalities in Orange County.

“The number of children who drown in Orange County each and every year is absolutely unacceptable,” said Julie Lopiccolo, Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention member and mother of Jasper Ray St. Clair who drowned before his second birthday in a babysitter’s backyard pool. “It is time for us and the community to take responsibility for protecting our children by taking actions that we know will save lives; namely gating pools and spas.”

According to the Orange County Health Care Agency and the Centers for Disease Control, drowning remains the number one cause of accidental death for children 1 to 4 years of age. Seniors, 65 years and older, especially older males, are the most at risk for drowning incidents. They also have the highest drowning incident death rate.

“All 118 drowning incidents last year are truly tragedies because every single one of them was preventable,” said Orange County Supervisor and Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention member Todd Spitzer. “No one should swim alone, whether an adult or a child, because that other person may save your life or the life of your child. At every pool event, there should be a designated pool watcher. If a child is missing, always check the pool first.”

The OCTA bus PSAs were developed from focus group input by staff of the Orange County Health Care Agency, who also serve on the task force, in partnership with Westbound Communications and OCTA. The campaign is focused on children and adults with the taglines, “*It Only Takes Seconds to Drown; Always Watch Your Children Around the Water,*” and “*Think Twice About Swimming Alone, Never Swim Alone.*” Four OCTA busses will be wrapped with the large PSAs and 50 additional busses will have the PSAs on their tail. Additional media is being explored for the campaign that will run through Labor Day Weekend.

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**News Release - OC Drowning Prevention Task Force  
6-29-16**

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“We will never know how many lives we save by the robust outreach we are embarking upon,” said Irvine City Councilman and Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention member Jeff Lalloway. “But if we save one life, that could become two, and then three. Communitywide knowledge is key.”

The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) compiles drowning statistics countywide that are submitted on a voluntary basis. As such, the number of incidents vary from year to year, depending upon which cities report and when or if they report.

Last year, according to OCFA, there were 118 drowning incidents and 50 fatalities in the county, compared with 86 drowning incidents and 43 fatalities in 2014. In 2015, 40 incidents involved children up to 4 years of age, five incidents were fatal. There were 30 drowning incidents in 2015 involving adults 55 years of age and older, 22 were fatal, nearly half of all drowning fatalities for the year.

All cities within Orange County are in the process of adopting technology to facilitate the uniform reporting of drowning incidents. Newport Beach is one of the first cities within the county to implement the software for this purpose. It’s expected that all cities within the county will have adopted the software by the end of 2017.

The Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention, working with the Association of California Cities, Orange County (ACCOC) is also in the process of evaluating changes in state legislation that could reduce drowning incidents and fatalities.

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**Attachments:**

PSAs

2015 Drowning Stats

2016 Drowning Stats

OC Drowning Prevention Task Force Members