Make scuba fun and safe for children

The European Child Safety Alliance, EuroSafe with the support of the European Commission released a new resource titled “Protecting children and youths in water recreation: safety guidelines for service providers."

DAN Europe is proud to have collaborated with the Alliance on this unique resource which is tailored to people working in the water recreation and tourism sectors. Developed in collaboration with professional water recreation associations and injury prevention organisations across Europe, these guidelines provide informative facts on injuries and hazards, and outline specific safety recommendations for 13 common water sports and settings in order to encourage safe water related activities of children ages 0- 18 years of age.

This summer, 70% of Europeans will be vacationing by the water, and 25% of them will be travelling with children under 18 years of age. Yet most families and service providers are unaware that adults and children are at higher risk of injury and drowning while on vacation. In fact, tourists are 10 times more likely to die of an injury than of an infectious disease. Naturally SCUBA diving entails its own particular risks and the implementation of rigorous safety standards for children is of extreme importance as children diving training is on the rise. Tourists have consistently higher rates of injury than local residents.

For example, it has been shown that more British children drowned while on holiday abroad than at home, and along the coast of Portugal, over 70% of children admitted to a hospital for a water submersion incident were foreigners. Within Europe every year there are between 14,000 – 47,000 boating injuries, and 236,000 swimming pool injuries. However, most of these injuries are not caused by equipment failures, but by uninformed or inappropriate user behaviour. Therefore, service providers can play a key role in preventing injuries and holiday tragedies by ensuring that their customers are (a) well- informed about risks and that they (b) respect the rules the provider presents. Not only will service providers be protecting customers, they will be protecting their own businesses as well.

“Protecting children and youths in water recreation: safety guidelines for service providers” provides helpful tools such as fact sheets on water recreation injuries and the role alcohol and tourism play in water safety, water recreation risk assessment questions, a further resource section, as well as specific guidelines for snorkeling, SCUBA diving, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, motorboats and personal watercraft, tow sports, windsurfing, kitesurfing, swimming pool, waterslide, and waterside safety. The guide can be easily viewed and downloaded in its entirety or by specific sport section at www.childsafetyeurope.org. During water safety recreation activities we recommend that all service providers undertake the following prevention measures and that recreation, tourism and public health bodies promote them:

- Perform a risk assessment of your area and activity
- Be aware of particular risks to vulnerable users such as children and youth
- Provide age and size appropriate equipment, such as personal flotation devices (PFD)
- Be sure that all staff members are well trained in safety and preventive measures including CPR and first aid.
- Inform customers of possible hazards and how to avoid them, and enforce your own safety rules
- Have a detailed emergency plan in place
- Forbid the use of alcohol while taking part in activities
- Use standard international symbols and signage to make hazards clear to all water users.

The European Child Safety Alliance is a Programme of EuroSafe and is hosted and supported by the Consumer Safety Institute in the Netherlands

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