

Kids are worth it

AMA's efforts to make playgrounds safer will reduce injuries

Now there is little excuse to stop communities from making their playgrounds safer and from dramatically reducing the toll playground injuries take on our children.

"Children will be spared injuries and perhaps death because of the work of physicians, the Children's Health Foundation through Alberta SAFE KIDS and other local groups in the community," said Dr. Alan I. Murdock, AMA spokesperson for the AMA/Alberta SAFE KIDS playground safety initiative.

With direction from the Health Issues Council, the AMA and SAFE KIDS researched, wrote and produced a resource kit to help communities evaluate and upgrade playgrounds, thereby reducing injuries. The comprehensive kit, *Removing*

Playground Hazards For Our Children's Sake — A Resource Kit for Alberta Communities, offers communities easy-to-use information

"Don't wait for a tragedy to make your children's world safer."

— Dr. Alan I. Murdock

not readily available before and addresses playground hazards such as entanglement and unsafe surfaces that are associated with many serious injuries. The kit is dedicated to 2½-year-old Cindy White.

In an Edmonton daycare tragedy in June 1992, Cindy became entangled on a slide. Without supervision, she was left hanging and strangled. This incident is not an isolated one of playground tragedy. More than 350 children are hospitalized for falls from playground equipment in the province each year. An estimated 23,475 emergency room visits in Alberta were due to playground-related injuries between 1987 and 1991. During 1991



and 1992, at least 600 primarily school-aged children were treated for playground injuries at the Alberta Children's Hospital emergency room in Calgary.

As Dr. Murdock says about the kit, "We're providing a starting point for rural and urban communities in carrying out some of the important solutions to playground safety — identifying and eliminating hazards whether renovating or constructing a new, safe playground and providing supervision. Use the kit. Don't wait for a tragedy to make your children's world safer."

AMA media relations work netted coverage on national TV, and on TV, radio and in newspapers across western Canada. Dr. Murdock has been busy doing interviews for feature and news stories since the June 4 Children's Miracle Network Telethon and June 14 news conference with Cindy's mom, Pam, and SAFE KIDS coordinator, Erima Shields.

This interest generated more than 300 kit orders from public and professional organizations as of early July. In addition, coalitions of recreation officials, health care groups

and daycares have been organized to encourage promoting the safety message according to community needs, with projects focusing on supervision, safe play, safe surfacing and playground inspections. The initiative has spawned public consultations for daycare operators in Calgary where Ms Shields increased awareness of the rationale of playground safety. In July, daycares finalized safety policies. Ms Shields also led workshops for Edmonton daycare licensing officers and they are now prepared to modify playgrounds for pre-school children.

Another partner in promoting the resource kit is the provincial ombudsman through a report on provincial daycares as a result of Cindy's death. This resulted in 500 orders of the resource kit's safety checklist for nursery schools. SAFE KIDS will continue to work with suppliers and recreation departments to profile playground injury prevention.

With considerable help from members — Dr. Alexander Leung, pediatrician; Dr. Alan I Murdock, Sturgeon Health Unit Medical Officer



of Health/ CEO; and Wendy Stewart, University of Calgary medical student — the AMA and Alberta SAFE KIDS spearheaded the writing and production of the kit and a slide presentation. This effort involved valuable contributions from Alberta Community Development, Recreation and Sport Branch; PlayWorks, Inc.; Sport Medicine Council of Alberta and the Sturgeon Health Unit. The Rotary Club of St. Albert published the kit as a community service and is organizing its distribution across western and northern Canada.

The \$10 resource kit can be ordered by contacting Dr. Murdock, Box 132, St. Albert, AB T8N 1N2. Please contact Alberta SAFE KIDS at the Children's Health Foundation at 433-5437 for information about the slide presentation *Playgrounds: A Safe Haven For Children*. For more information about the project, please contact Candy L. Holland, AMA Communications Officer at 482-2626. ✉