



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Feb. 1, 2016

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OC Task Force on Drowning Prevention Advances Support for Uniform Incident Tracking, Outreach Campaign Concepts

Expert Panel Endorses Effort to Improve Reporting Countywide, Promote Public Awareness

Irvine, Calif. – Meeting today for the second time since its inception in Aug. 2015, Orange County’s Task Force on Drowning Prevention endorsed countywide uniform incident reporting standards. The expert panel also approved concepts for development of a summer public outreach campaign, directed research for potential state legislation, and asked a work group to evaluate a bid to host the International Life Saving Federation’s (ILS) 2019 World Conference on Drowning Prevention.

“Orange County has great weather year-round, the Pacific Ocean at our western edge, and backyard and community swimming pools that dominate the landscape of our neighborhoods,” said Tustin Councilman and Orange County Task Force on Drowning Prevention Chairman Al Murray. “It’s become very clear to us that being unified in how we report drowning incidents and in how we promote drowning prevention is critical to reducing these absolutely preventable episodes of near drowning and drowning.”

The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) gathers 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 113 drowning incidents and 45 fatalities in the county, compared with 86 drowning incidents and 43 fatalities in 2014.

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. Newport Beach Fire Department Captain Adam Novak provided a demonstration for the task force of how the software is being used in the field by his department.

Orange County’s Health Care Agency (HCA) has taken the lead in developing a public awareness campaign for the task force. A presentation was made by representatives of Westbound Communications on progress to date. The public awareness campaign is expected to launch in late spring, early summer.

A task force work group was also directed to evaluate changes in state legislation that could reduce drowning incidents and fatalities and report back on their findings at the next task force meeting.

Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian, Irvine, emergency room nurses Lawayne Ponzio and Angela Agar were named to the task force as representative and alternate respectively. Orange County Fire Authority Education Specialist Alexa Pratt was named task force secretary.

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.