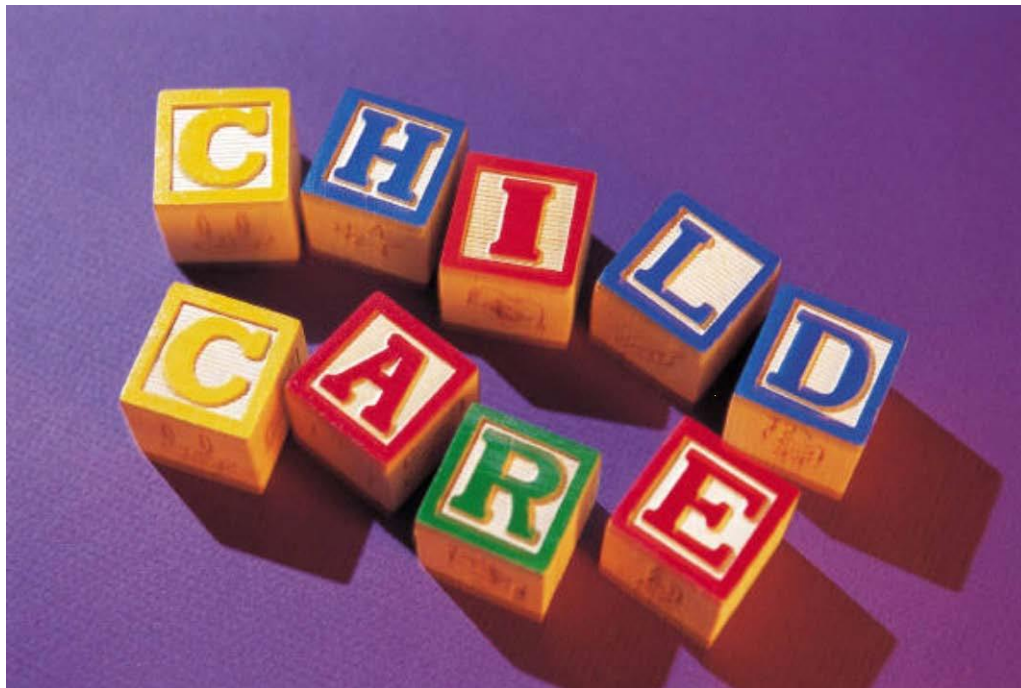


# Barriers to Protect Children from Life-Threatening Safety Hazards

Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Early Childhood Education  
Office of Child Care

## Resource Guide



2012

Replaces Circular Letter #97-06 Barriers to Protect Children from Life-Threatening Safety Hazards (June 11, 1997)

## Guidance

### Barriers to Protect Children from Life-Threatening Safety Hazards

Supervision of children is the most important element in maintaining their safety. However, children often do the unexpected, for which those supervising them are unprepared. Effective barriers prevent or delay children's access to hazards. There may be many hazards near child care facilities from which children need to be protected.

Swimming pools, spas, and hot tubs located in close proximity to child care facilities are potential sources of injuries and drowning. Other hazards such as high cliffs, bodies of water, heavy machinery, heavy vehicular traffic, train tracks (currently in use), etc. are also life-threatening hazards from which children require protection. The following steps should be taken when identifying and ameliorating life threatening safety hazards in, around or near your child care facility.

Inspect the premises of the child care facility and adjacent areas for potentially life-threatening hazards such as high cliffs, bodies of water, swimming pools, hot tubs, spas, heavy vehicular traffic, heavy machinery, train tracks (currently in use), and other hazards. Life-threatening safety hazards must have barriers making them inaccessible to children.

#### I. **Walls or Fences for Protection from Life-Threatening Hazards** (See Page 6 for illustrations)

If the barrier is a wall or fence, it must make the safety hazard inaccessible to children by completely enclosing the hazard or the children. The wall or fence must meet the following specifications:

- A. Height – at least 4 feet high.
- B. Foot- and Hand-Holds – The barrier may not have foot-holds or hand-holds a child could climb.
  - 1. If the barrier is a chain-link fence, the opening should be no larger than 2 ¼ inches between parallel sides of the link. (See Figure 3.)

2. If the barrier is a picket or ornamental fence, it must meet the following specifications:
  - a. Fences with horizontal and vertical members:
    - (1) Horizontal members must be located on the hazard side of the fence if the distance between the tops of the horizontal members is less than 45 inches. Space between vertical members shall not exceed 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. (See Figure 1.)
    - (2) Where the distance between the tops of the horizontal members is 45 inches or more, spacing between vertical members shall not exceed 4 inches. (See Figure 2.)
  - b. Decorative cutouts shall not exceed 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches in width.
- C. Ground Clearance – The bottom edge of the wall or fence must not be more than 4 inches from the ground.
- D. Gates and Latches – The gates in the wall or fence must be selfclosing and self-latching. The latches must be inaccessible to young children.
- E. The area against the wall or fence must be kept free of items a child could use to climb over the fence and into the hazard area such as, but not limited to, picnic tables and outdoor furniture.
- F. If the walls of the building housing the child care facility are parts of the barrier you must ensure that:
  1. Doors which open to the hazard are equipped with alarms. Alarm must be audible and sound continuously for at least 30 seconds when the doors are opened. If the doors are not used as fire exits, they must be locked.
  2. Windows which open to the hazard are evaluated to ensure the protection of children.

NOTE: All windows in your facility should be evaluated by providers to ensure child safety.

## II. **Other Barriers for Pools, Spas, or Hot Tubs**

### **A.** Above-Ground Pools

1. If not made inaccessible by another type of barrier, a pool with sides less than 4 feet above the walking surface must have:
  - a. A barrier mounted on the pool structure bringing the total height of the structure to at least 4 above the walking surface, and
  - b. Vertical clearance between the top of the pool and the bottom of the barrier not more than 4 inches.
2. Pool walls 4 feet or higher above the walking surface at all points need no additional barriers but must have the following safeguards:
  - a. All retractable ladders locked in the upright position during child care hours.
  - b. All removable ladders stored away from the pool.
  - c. Any permanent steps to the pool made inaccessible to children with childproof gates (at least 4 feet high) with locks or inaccessible latches.
3. Pool areas must be kept free of items children could use to climb into the pool such as, but not limited to, picnic tables and outdoor furniture. Pool water filters may need barriers to prevent children from using them to climb into pools.

**B.** In-Ground Pools - A power safety cover over the pool may be used as an alternate barrier. A power safety cover must

meet the requirements of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) F1346 1991 (Performance Specification for Safety Covers and Labeling Requirements for All Covers for Swimming Pools, and Hot Tubs) which addresses labeling requirements and performance. The power safety cover must be closed when the pool is not being used.

- C. Spas and Hot Tubs – A cover that complies with ASTM F 1346 1991 may be used. The cover must be locked.

### III. **Additional Safety Precautions for Pools**

- A. A child should never be left unsupervised near a pool or spa.
- B. Always check the pool or spa first if a child is missing. Standing at the edge of the pool, scan the pool bottom, surface, and the entire pool area.
- C. Rescue equipment should be kept by the pool. A reaching pole with shepherd's hook is the best rescue equipment to use for children. A ring buoy with a rope may also be used.
- D. A poolside telephone with emergency numbers posted nearby is recommended.
- E. Keep your First Aid and CPR training current.
- F. Remove toys from in and around the pool when it is not in use to avoid attracting children to the pool.
- G. Gates in the pool barrier should never be propped open.

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:** Paula Johnson, Chief of Licensing, Office of Child Care (410) 569-8071

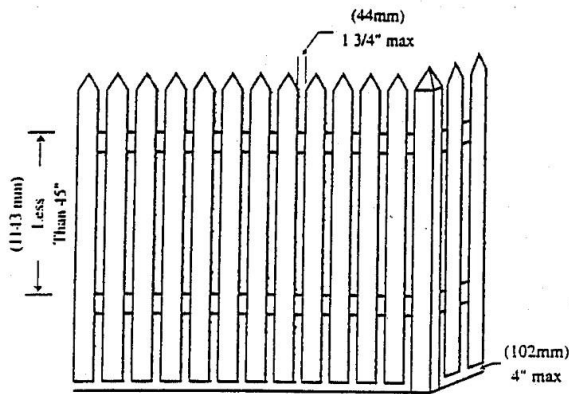


FIG. 1 IF HORIZONTAL MEMBERS ARE LESS THAN 45" (1143mm) APART, THE SPACE BETWEEN VERTICAL MEMBERS SHALL NOT EXCEED 1-3/4" (44mm).

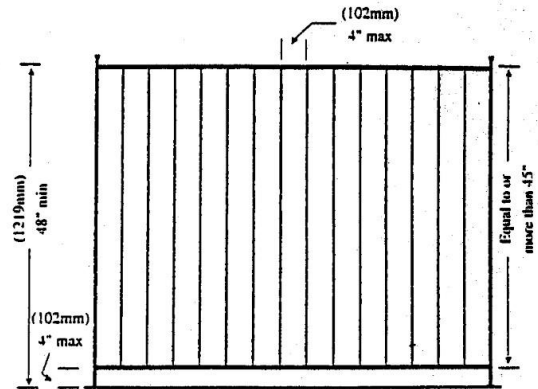


FIG. 2 IF HORIZONTAL MEMBERS ARE EQUAL TO OR MORE THAN 48" (1219mm) APART, THE SPACE BETWEEN VERTICAL MEMBERS SHALL NOT EXCEED 4" (102mm).

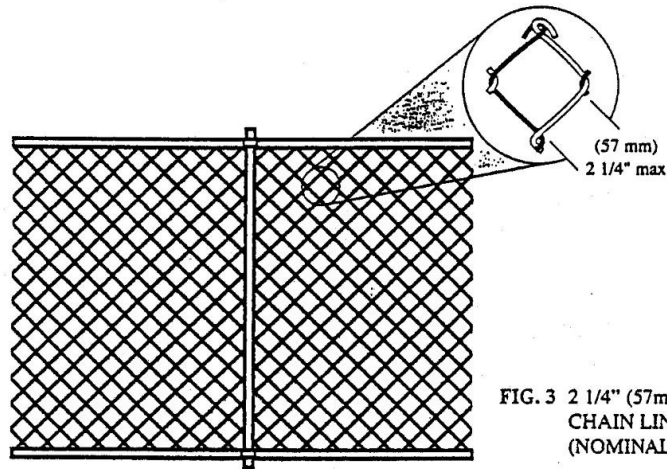
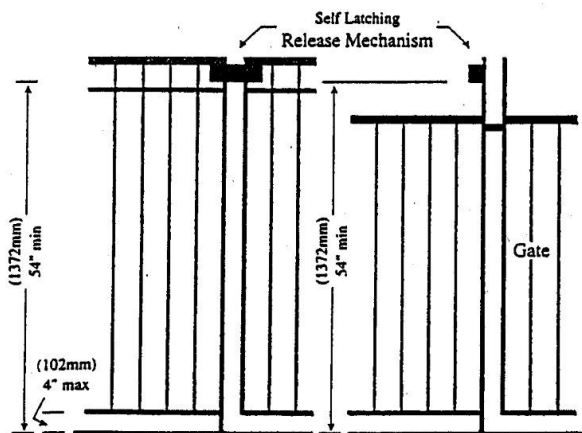
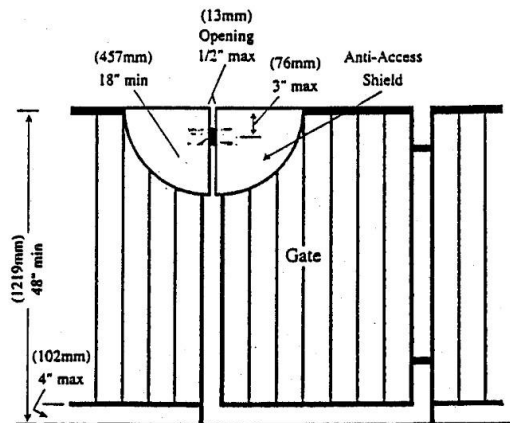


FIG. 3 2 1/4" (57mm) SQUARE CHAIN LINK MESH. (NOMINAL)



RELEASE MECHANISM LOCATED AT 54" (1372mm) OR HIGHER FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE GATE.



RELEASE MECHANISM LOCATED LESS THAN 54" (1372mm) FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE GATE.

FIG. 4 LATCH RELEASE MECHANISM.