Press Release

International organisations call for tap water temperature limits to reduce the number of severe scalds to children in Europe
Amsterdam, 10 December 2010

Hot bath water is the most common cause of severe scalds to young children in Europe.

The European Child Safety Alliance has released a position statement and backgrounder on the danger of tap water scalds. The statement is supported by several European and international organisations and national partners from more than 20 countries (listed on the position statement).

Severe and life-threatening tap water scalds happen in a few seconds. Children, who are most commonly the victims of injuries, have skin 15 times thinner than adult skin, and therefore suffer scalds more easily and quickly. Common scenarios include a child turning the tap by itself when a caregiver’s back is turned, or a caregiver underestimating the water temperature while the bath fills. These injuries often end with long hospitalisations, painful and expensive surgeries or grafts, and sadly, deformation or even death.

Currently there are no European-wide regulations concerning the maximum temperature of domestic tap water at the exit point (i.e., the tap), and many consumers are unaware of the risks. Yet tap water scalds are easily preventable through modifications in the home environment, such as using thermostatic mixing valves to prevent excessively hot water from exiting the tap.

Dr. Jacques Latarjet, burns specialist and former President of the European Burns Association, said “it is heartbreaking to repeatedly see young children suffer these painful injuries and treatments, when these incidents could easily be prevented altogether.”

Joanne Vincenten, Director of the European Child Safety Alliance, said “a combined approach of legislation, good engineering and solid education to the public, would greatly reduce the number of tap water scalds to children in Europe. The technology already exists, we just need to use it.”

The position statement and background paper outline the severity of the risks and provide specific recommendations for the European Commission and Member States to adopt in order to reduce scald injuries. By limiting the maximum bath water temperature at the exit to 50°C in the European Community, severe scalds and permanent disability to children would be greatly reduced.

The position statement also has the support of the: European Burns Association, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), Health Environment Alliance (HEAL), and International Society for Child And Adolescent Injury Prevention (ISCAIP). Download the position statement and backgrounder and read further information about the risk of tap water scalds in Europe at www.childsafetyeurope.org.

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Journalist Note: References for the information cited above are available on the position statement and backgrounder at www.childsafetyeurope.org.