

# In accidental deaths, kids are not all right



Phillip O'Neill

DEATHS of toddlers from accidents started appearing regularly in news bulletins in early September. The sequence of deaths was shocking.

On Monday, September 5, a five-year-old boy was run over by his father at their home at Melton South in Geelong.

On Thursday, September 22, a two-year-old girl was run over by her mother at Lindfield.

On Monday, September 26, a two-year-old boy was run over by his mother on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula.

On Wednesday, September 28, a three-year-old boy was run over by his mother in Rushcutters Bay.

And on Friday, September 30, a one-year-old girl was run over by her father at Katherine in the Northern Territory.

My earliest memory of horror was one such event, although it was reasonably remote to my own life. It involved a friend of my parents, a local policeman, who drove over and killed his toddler on their driveway. I have never forgotten my parents' telling of that event.

Even as a young child I can recall being stunned – not just by realisation that death was possible in this way, but that a tragic event of unfathomable proportions could have happened to that man, that life's uncontrollable daily happenings could be rolled out in such a wicked way; that anyone's luck, father's or son's, could be so bad.

Then, as if to ram home the immensity of misfortune that is possible, on our chilly long weekend, Monday, October 3, we heard that a three-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl had been struck by a train at the back of their Wallace home near Ballarat in Victoria when the pair strayed on to the railway line, and a few days later we saw the news that the boy had died.

Then we read that his astonishingly courageous parents had donated their dead son's organs for transplanting.

I'm staring at a graph which shows when people are most likely to die.

Obviously older people have much higher death rates. And young men and booze and cars combine to



**DANGER:** Kids up to four years old have a significantly higher chance of death because of accidents.

show a dramatic rise in death rates for 15 to 30 year olds.

In contrast, kids aged 5 to 14 years are as tough as nails, virtually indestructible.

But their younger brothers and sisters, toddlers up to four years old, have a significantly higher chance of death, and this higher chance is because of accidents.

According to national health and Kidsafe statistics, accidental deaths involving toddlers come primarily from drownings and from motor vehicle accidents either as a passenger or by being run over.

These causes also top the list of accidents to children whether a death is involved or not.

The other items on Kidsafe's accident list are house fires, falls, nursery furniture, scalds, poisoning, bicycles and in-line skates and skateboards.

In a typical year, about 700 children die from accidents in Australia.

What is intriguing is the variation in accident death rates according to

where children live. Children in outer regional and remote areas of NSW have rates of injury deaths more than three times higher than kids in major urban areas.

The Farmsafe people give us some explanation.

Farmsafe says that about 20 children are fatally injured on Australian farms each year.

The main reasons are drownings in dams (which mostly involve toddlers) and accidents associated with quad bikes and other farm vehicles.

Farmsafe wants us all to know that about 25 per cent of child injury deaths involve visitors to farms, a rate which climbs to 50 per cent when quad bikes are involved.

Another thing that stands out in the stats is that injury deaths for boys are 50 per cent higher than for girls, no matter where they live.

Why's that? Are girls tougher, smarter – or just luckier?

Besides remoteness and gender, the stats show two other major variations in injury deaths among

children. One relates to social class. Children from poorer families have three times the injury death rates than kids from richer families.

Why's that? Just bad luck?

The other major variation relates to a kid's Indigenous status.

If a child is from an Aboriginal family in the Northern Territory then he or she is seven times more likely to die from an injury or accident than a child from a suburb in Newcastle or Sydney.

Think about it. Even the numbers on a dice don't go as high as seven.

Is it just rotten luck to be born Aboriginal, especially in an outback region?

Or is there stuff that needs doing that would make daily happenings for these kids a great deal safer?

**Professor Phillip O'Neill is the director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.**



## Wounding remarks

There has been a mixed response to criminals targeting gun club members with nearly 50 firearms stolen across the Hunter since April.

**Ban the lot.** If you're not in the police, or a farmer then you don't need handguns or rifles. If they all went into the metal shredder then the world would be a safer place.  
**onlyrednecksneedguns**

I keep my guns in a secure safe but I never keep ammo at home – that way if they get the guns they are no good without bullets.  
**wilbur**

Ban the lot that's such a smart idea. Look at how well banning drugs has gone, people just need to be mindful on the security.  
**reason**

If the police have identified a vibrant black market for illegal firearms in the Hunter, why are they not arresting those participating in this vibrant black market.  
**concernedshooter**

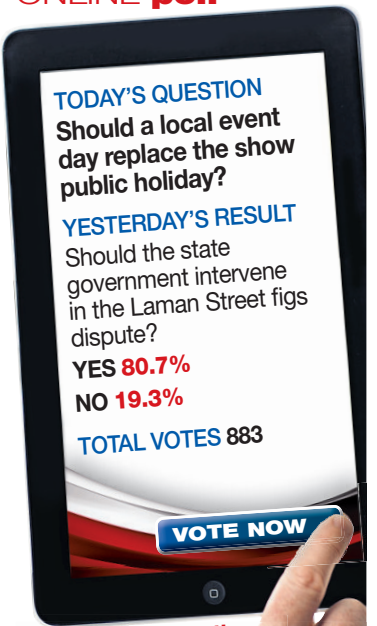
Obviously the safes are not secure enough – it would be very noisy and hard work to remove a properly secured one – they should all be 8 millimetre steel – not the shoe lockers they are currently allowed to have.  
**buzzsaw**

Criminals will forever have guns. If guns were banned the only thing it would do is take guns from law-abiding citizens as 99 per cent of people that own guns in Australia use them for target competition, recreational hunting or vermin control.  
**Big wardy**

Just another example of how police resources have been wasted on unnecessary checking of licensed shooters instead of catching criminals. Perhaps police time should be spent enforcing laws such as theft and assaults and actually catching criminals.  
**Lattesippingwinger**

Guns don't kill people, people kill people.  
**Mark**

## ONLINE poll



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# Don't be still, beating hearts, but lively

More passion is needed to save all things great and small, says **Colin Haggar**.

ON Friday, October 7, Newcastle witnessed a sad day when the protest against the removal of the iconic Laman Street figs turned ugly.

Passions ran deep and police and contract personnel engaged in the removal of the figs had a far-from-normal working day.

Television footage records assaults and other desperate action being taken by those who felt that the decision made by Newcastle City Council was the wrong one.

We show what is important to us by the actions we take.

And we show how important something is to us by the scope of the

actions we are prepared to take.

Conversely, we also show what is not important to us by the actions we don't take.

Is the protest at Laman Street over the top and misplaced? Some would argue that the only contribution of these trees to our quality of life is one of aesthetics. But sometimes aesthetics and quality of life are important. We all should take time to smell the flowers and to enjoy the beauty of our natural environment.

Let's not be content when what we value is threatened with removal. Let's not just be idle and apathetic and accept what comes our way. Let's do everything we can to make this world a better place for everyone who lives here.

And let's remember that there are other important matters that need passion and a pro-active voice.

The Bible reminds us that God cares about the environment – not one sparrow dies without God being aware of it – but human life is worth much more (Matthew 10:29-31).

The perceived crime of Newcastle City Council in cutting down the figs pales in comparison to the crime our federal government tried to commit by changing Australian law so that stateless, vulnerable people including unaccompanied minors, could be sent to an unimaginable and precarious existence in a refugee camp in Malaysia.

And there are other issues that deserve our attention, our passion and our action. Millions are starving in the Horn of Africa while we in Australia dump food and battle an obesity epidemic. Pakistan and Haiti are still struggling to cope after huge natural disasters over the past

couple of years but these things pass so easily out of our minds as time goes by. And even here in the lucky country, every night people sleep rough on the streets or in their cars.

So I encourage passion. We need more passion – not less. But let's not be so self-centred and selfish that the only things that arouse our passions are those things that affect our amenity and enjoyment of life. Let's be bigger than that and reflect God's heart and concern for all people in all our actions.

**Major Colin Haggar is the secretary for business administration for The Salvation Army, Newcastle and Central NSW Division. Article submitted on behalf of the Hunter Churches Media Association.**