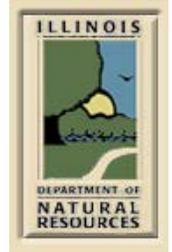




**American
Red Cross**

Illinois Department of
DCFS
Children & Family Services



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
May 18, 2015

The American Red Cross, Illinois DCFS, Illinois DNR and Illinois Association of Park Districts Team Up to Promote Water Safety, Prevent Drowning

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The American Red Cross, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Association of Park Districts will team up for a 10:00 a.m. press conference on Wednesday, May 20 at the Springfield Elks Lodge #158, 409 East Lake Shore Drive.

“In this age of constant distraction, it is important for parents and other caregivers to pay attention when children are in or near any body of water, which is why Governor Rauner proclaimed May as Childhood Drowning Prevention Month in Illinois,” said George Sheldon, Acting Director of Illinois DCFS. “The public can help DCFS draw attention to this very preventable issue and together we can save lives.”

“The single-most important thing parents can do is to be sure children are wearing properly fitting life jackets,” said Wayne Rosenthal, Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. “Children should always wear a life jacket, and adults should set a good example by wearing theirs, too.”

In 2014, 24 Illinois children under the age of 18 lost their lives due to accidental drowning: 13 in pools; 4 in ponds; 3 in lakes; 2 in bathtubs; 1 in a river; and 1 in a large bucket. Nine of the children who drowned in pools were under the age of five. Self-closing, self-locking gates, alarms and other types of warning sensors can go a long way in protecting children. Toddlers have also been known to drown in large buckets used in home improvement projects so it is extremely important to empty buckets and turn them over when they are not in use.

“The American Red Cross, in partnership with other community organizations across Illinois, offers a variety of water safety classes and swimming lessons that can save a child’s life,” said Bryan Soady, Executive Director of the American Red Cross Serving South Central Illinois. “We also recommend that caregivers learn CPR and keep rescue equipment, a telephone and emergency numbers nearby.” More water safety tips are available at redcross.org/watersafety.

“Park districts and recreation agencies are often the heart of their communities, a place for gathering and bonding, but they also fill a critical need – education,” said Peter Murphy, President and CEO for the Illinois Association of Park Districts. “Education is

the key to combating this important issue, and we are honored to be a part of this team to share the important message about learning to swim and drowning prevention.”

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Media Note: Press conference will move inside if inclement weather with backdrop of lake.

DCFS receives, investigates and acts upon a report of child abuse or neglect every five minutes. Tens of thousands of children are safer thanks to those who call our Child Abuse hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (252-2873) each year. Working together, we can ensure a safe, loving home and brighter future for every child.

The mission of the **Illinois Department of Natural Resources** is to manage, conserve and protect Illinois' natural, recreational and cultural resources; further the public's understanding and appreciation of those resources; and promote the education, science and public safety of Illinois' natural resources for present and future generations.

The **American Red Cross** shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to victims of disasters; supplies about 40 percent of the nation's blood; teaches skills that save lives; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a not-for-profit organization that depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission.

The **Illinois Association of Park Districts** is a nonprofit service, research and education organization that serves park districts, forest preserves, conservation, municipal park and recreation and special recreation agencies. The association advances these agencies, their citizen board members and professional staff in their ability to provide outstanding park and recreation opportunities, preserve natural resources and improve the quality of life for all people in Illinois.

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