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## Raising the barrier for child safety

**A study carried out by ANEC shows that balcony barriers and swimming pool fences used in homes across Europe are not effective in stopping young children from climbing them quickly. However, simple changes to their design would markedly improve the degree of safety offered.**

With summer officially starting today, almost everyone is looking forward to relaxing at home in the sunshine. Unfortunately, elevated terraces and balconies pose particular risks to young children, as do swimming pools that do not have adequate fencing.

A study<sup>1</sup> undertaken by ANEC, which focused on the effectiveness of various designs of balcony barriers and swimming pool fences in increasing the safety of children in the 4 to 6 years age group, shows that simple barriers comprising vertical bars or solid panels, with heights 1.1m to 1.2m, could be climbed by around half of children<sup>2</sup> within 30 seconds.

The most effective barrier in the study was 1.2m high and inclined at an angle towards the child. This barrier stopped almost 90% of children: no child could pass the barrier within 10 seconds and only 7% succeeded climbing it in less than 30 seconds. A barrier with a wider top, designed to be more difficult to grip, was also more effective and stopped 80% of children.

Stephen Russell, ANEC Secretary-General, commented: "Children have a natural curiosity and climbing is a natural behaviour for them. They can - and will - climb objects in their environment and, as they grow older, their climbing ability improves. But climbing can end in serious injury or even a fatality. Unfortunately, the dimensions and designs of balcony barriers and pool fences differ from country to country with many proving ineffective as regulators, architects and designers appear to underestimate children's climbing skills."

"ANEC will seek harmonized European standards for balcony barriers, pool fences and stair barriers in order to give more effective protection to all children in Europe."

<sup>1</sup>"Dimensions and design of swimming pool fences, balcony barriers and other guardrails for buildings to protect children below 6 years old", <http://www.anec.eu/anec.asp?rd=77474&ref=07-01.01-01&lang=en>

<sup>2</sup>A testing group comprised of 157 children in the 4 to 6 years age group tested 5 different barriers.

## ANEC in brief

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