

APPENDIX C

Child Fatality Review Team Data Compared to Death Certificate Data

While death certificates document the fact and cause of a child's death, they do not include information on the circumstances of that death. For example, while a child who dies in a motor vehicle crash can be identified using death certificates, the death certificate gives no information on whether or not the driver had been drinking or whether the child was appropriately seat-belted — two important prevention issues.

Although preliminary death certificates are the starting point for Child Fatality Review (CFR) case selection, the data presented in this report may conflict with data presented in the Oregon Vital Statistics Annual Report Part 2. There are at least two reasons for this. First, as CFR teams review the circumstances surrounding a death in detail, the teams may conclude that the manner or cause of death is different from that on the official death certificate as filled out by the Medical Examiner. When this occurs the findings of the teams are sent to the Medical Examiner, and a request to change the death certificate is made. Second, this report includes, in some instances, data on non-resident children who died in Oregon, while the Vital Statistics system only counts Oregon residents. Local teams are encouraged to review child death of non-residents because the prevention issues are often related to where the injuries occur, rather than to where the child lives. In addition, because of jurisdictional issues of the investigating agencies involved, injuries that occur away from home can sometimes be more difficult to investigate thoroughly.

How do cases reviewed by the CFR teams compare with all child deaths in Oregon? In 1999 the CFR cases represent 38% (185/490) of the total childhood fatalities that occurred in Oregon. CFR cases include all of the homicides, suicides, unintentional deaths, unexplained infant deaths and some natural deaths that occurred in Oregon in 1999. However, the state and local teams generally do not review cases of child fatality in which the attending physician, rather than the Medical Examiner, signs the death certificate. This means that local teams do not review most deaths due to “natural causes” (i.e., disease or illness).