

## Event teaches kids water safety

Valley grade-schoolers have fun while learning about dangers, prevention

**Toby Phillips** The Arizona Republic Mar. 26, 2008 12:00 AM

Seven-year-old Cesar Luz and 1,200 other first-graders were greeted by an Olympic swimmer, clowns and a singing fireman Tuesday at the ninth annual Water Safety Day.

The kids from across the Valley spent the day learning about water safety, singing songs and repeating their ABCs - the Water Safety ABCs.

A is for adult supervision; B is for barriers and fencing around pools and C is for classes like swim lessons and CPR. Phoenix Children's Hospital hosted the annual event with Valley fire departments and local businesses.

Fourteen children died in Maricopa County as a result of drowning last year, according to the Arizona Department of Health Services.

But despite these figures, for Cesar, learning about water safety was about having fun, too.

"This was the best day of my life," Cesar said, just after sitting in a fire truck for the first time.

Water Safety Day is at the end of a seven-week safety curriculum that Cesar, his fellow students from Excelencia School and the rest of the first-graders got in their classrooms.

Cesar's teacher, Natalie Phillips, said the event was a good opportunity to talk with the young kids about water.

"A lot of the kids associate water with the beach and the lake or ocean," Phillips said. "They don't think they could ever get hurt in a bathtub or a bucket."

Cesar repeated the water safety ABCs as he stamped his hand on a framed piece of cardboard. The handprint was a pledge that Cesar would obey rules around water.

Cesar's mom, Sandra Luz, said she is always careful when Cesar is around water.

Cesar is taking swimming lessons, and his mom said that even though he may know how to swim, accidents could still happen.

"Sometimes we make the kids think they are big enough to do anything," Luz said. "They think they are Superman or Spider-Man and that accidents are funny.

"But it's not funny to just let kids in the swimming pool without watching them."

Organizers called Water Safety Day the kick-off to the swimming season. Tiffaney Isaacson, water-safety coordinator at Phoenix Children's Hospital, said that as temperatures rise, water accidents typically rise as well.

"It's 86 degrees. You're probably eyeballing it (the pool) and ready to get out there and see if it's warm enough to get into it," Isaacson said. "I can guarantee if you have a 2-year-old, they're thinking the same thing."

Even as Cesar talks about swimming and doing backflips, he also got the message to be careful.

"I haven't drowned yet," Cesar said. "My dad takes care of me. I know how to swim. I do the things they tell me. That's why I don't drown."