

Safe Kids OBC joins national effort to curb battery injuries

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Patricia Funderburk, director of Safe Kids of Orangeburg, Bamberg and Calhoun Counties, is spearheading local efforts to educate about the national partnership launched by Safe Kids Worldwide and Energizer to share life-saving information with parents and caregivers about the potential risks of swallowing coin lithium batteries.

Safe Kids of Orangeburg, Bamberg and Calhoun Counties, led by the Regional Medical Center and the RMC Foundation, has taken another step in its mission to prevent injuries and death to children by spearheading local efforts for "The Battery Controlled."

This national partnership, launched by Safe Kids Worldwide and Energizer, provides life-saving information to parents and caregivers about the potential risks of swallowing coin lithium batteries.

Today, cars start with the push of a button, candles flicker without a flame and thousands of electronics operate by remote control. As demand grows for slimmer and sleeker electronic devices, so does demand for the coin lithium batteries that power them. And with that, the risk grows that a small child will swallow one.

When a coin-sized button battery gets stuck in a child's throat, the saliva triggers an electrical current. This causes a chemical reaction that can severely burn the esophagus in as little as two hours. Once the burning reaction begins, it can continue even after the battery is removed. Repairing the damage is painful and can require feeding tubes, breathing tubes and multiple surgeries. In some cases, children who swallowed button batteries have died.

"The Battery Controlled" message is simple:

1. Keep button batteries and devices that use them out of reach if the battery compartments aren't secure. Some parents have secured devices with strong tape.
2. If a child swallows a battery, go to the emergency room right away.
3. Tell others about this hidden danger.

The number of cases where children have been seriously hurt or have died as a result of swallowing a button battery has more than quadrupled in the past five years, compared to the five years prior to that. In 2010 alone, there were more than 3,500 swallowing cases of all sizes and types of button batteries reported to U.S. poison control centers, according to Dr. Toby Litovitz, executive and medical director of the National Capital Poison Center. The most serious injuries are usually associated with the 20-millimeter-diameter coin lithium battery. In the majority of swallowing incidents among children, the batteries have come out of remote control devices.

For more information or review videos and tip sheets, visit thebatterycontrolled.com.