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press release

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HUD No. 98-472

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For Release

1:00 p.m. Thursday

October 1, 1998

CUOMO ANNOUNCES NEW LIFE-SAVING HEALTHY HOMES INITIATIVE TO PROTECT MILLIONS OF AMERICAN CHILDREN FROM HOME HAZARDS

See Comments on HUD's Healthy Homes for Healthy Children Initiative

NEW YORK - Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo today announced a new life-saving initiative that will use TV commercials, newspaper ads, millions of brochures and a toll-free information line to help parents protect their children from potentially deadly hidden dangers in their homes.

"Tragically, home hazards kill or injure about 2.5 million American children each year - a terrible figure that sounds like the casualty toll in a year of war," Cuomo said. "Our children need our protection. For them, reducing home hazards is quite literally a matter of life and death."

"Our message to parents is that HUD not only wants to help you buy and keep a home - we want to help you make your home healthy and safe for your children," Cuomo said.

Accidental injuries are the Number 1 killer of children in the United States.

TV home improvement expert Bob Vila, host of the television show "Home Again" - who joined Cuomo at a news conference today announcing the Healthy Homes for Healthy Children initiative - will appear in both HUD's TV and print ads and in the Department's home safety brochure. The ad campaign will be in English and Spanish.

"I'm glad to have this opportunity to work with Secretary Cuomo to help parents learn how to make their homes safer for their children," Vila said. "I get tremendous satisfaction knowing that because of the Healthy Homes initiative children will be saved from injury and even death. I can't think of a more worthwhile public service."

Cuomo said he became interested in making homes safer as a result of an accident in his own home in 1996, when his daughter Mariah, then about a year old, pulled down the hot water spigot on a water cooler and scalded one side of her body. She was hospitalized with burns.

"As a father of three daughters, I know the greatest pain any parent can experience is to see his or her child suffer," Cuomo said. "Our Healthy Homes initiative will prevent some of that suffering, saving families from the nightmare of sickness or injury caused by an unhealthy home."

The HUD initiative is a partnership with several groups and federal agencies that together will distribute millions of the safety brochures throughout the nation and take other actions to help parents make their homes safer.

HUD's founding partners for the Healthy Homes initiative are: the American Lung Association, the Mortgage Bankers Association of America, the National Association of Home Builders, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Institute for Business and Home Safety, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and the NeighborWorks Network, the American College

of Emergency Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics. In addition to the founding partners, HUD is also partnering with the following federal agencies: the Environmental Protection Agency, the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Groups will distribute the safety brochures to their members and clients. For example, HUD will give brochures to the approximately 800,000 homebuyers who get mortgages insured by HUD's Federal Housing Administration (FHA) each year. In addition, the Institute for Business and Home Safety, on behalf of the insurance industry, will safeguard about 93,000 nonprofit child care facilities across the United States from dangers associated with natural disasters. The Mortgage Bankers Association will reprint brochures with their logo and distribute them to members around the country. The Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and the NeighborWorks Network has pledged to reprint and distribute healthy homes materials to the thousands of NeighborWorks homeowners they help each year. The American Academy of Pediatrics, on behalf of its 53,000 members, will help distribute the Healthy Homes materials at its national and regional meetings. The Emergency Physicians will distribute information to thousands of its members through local chapters. The American Lung Association will incorporate Healthy Homes into its nationwide Indoor Air Quality public outreach campaign.

To supplement HUD's advertising campaign, the National Association of Broadcasters will make the spot available to more than 1,100 television stations as a public service announcement giving the message even greater viewership.

The Healthy Homes brochure - called Danger in the Home - lists 37 simple and useful tips for parents that can make their homes safer for children. It also lists HUD's toll-free hotline - 1-800-HUDS-FHA - that parents can call for more information, and gives ways to contact five other groups for additional information.

The safety tips cover precautionary moves such as: testing homes built before 1978 for lead paint; using safety gates to keep young children from falling down stairs; making sure that furnaces, fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, space heaters and gas appliances are vented properly to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning; placing non-slip backing on area rugs to prevent falls; locking up guns and rifles and keeping them unloaded; testing homes for radon; keeping appliance cords unplugged and tied up; turning pot handles to the back of the stove to prevent children from knocking down hot food that could burn them; avoiding strings on toys and pacifiers that could strangle young children; installing smoke detectors outside bedrooms on every floor of a home; locking up all medicines and vitamins to keep them away from young children; and setting water heaters to 120 degrees to prevent scalding.

In the TV commercials that will be aired, Vila says dangers in the home can include "improperly wired outlets that can electrocute, water coolers that can burn, lead paint that can poison, household cleaners that can kill. To find out about them, call HUD." An announcer then says: "For a free brochure on HUD's Healthy Homes and FHA loans, just call. HUD and FHA are on your side." Words on the screen then give HUD's 800-number for Healthy Homes as the contact "for a free brochure on HUD's Healthy Homes and FHA loans."

The headline on the similar newspaper ad for Healthy Homes is: "Your home may not be as safe as you think."

HUD is also helping educate the public about home hazards with a Web page devoted to Healthy Homes. HUD's website address is: <http://www.hud.gov>

Healthy Homes information will also be posted on the Web sites of HUD's partners in the initiative.

HUD Assistant Secretary-Designee for Housing and FHA Commissioner William Apgar called the Healthy Homes Initiative "a win-win for HUD. It makes good business sense for FHA because it will make borrowers aware of FHA and it also is a good public service."

To encourage HUD-assisted housing to incorporate the principles of Healthy Homes,

HUD is giving preference points in grant competitions to groups that build or rehabilitate housing that is safe for children. Such housing includes items such as child safety latches, smoke detectors, window guards, and devices that limit the temperature of hot water.

HUD is also inspecting public housing around the country to ensure that the housing meets Healthy Homes standards for the protection of the 3 million people living in public housing.

In addition, HUD-funded housing counseling gives homebuyers information about creating Healthy Homes.