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# The Texas Child Fatality Review Team Post



## In this issue ...

**Page One**  
Meet the State  
CFRT Coordinator

Save the Date:  
Annual Conference

**Page Two**  
Prevention Focus on  
Water Safety

Travis Co. CFRT  
Annual Report

Crimes Against  
Children Conference

**Page Three**  
The State of Child  
Fatality Review in TX

Update on 80<sup>th</sup>  
Legislative Session

**Page Four**  
Power of the Well-  
Trained Team

Online Data Reporting  
System

**Page Five**  
Attorney General Rules  
On Open Records  
Requests

Make the Most of Your  
Newsletter

**Page Six**  
SCFRT Committee  
Wants to Hear From  
You!

## Meet the State CFRT Coordinator

My name is Susan Rodriguez. You may have met me when I visited your team meeting, or received an e-mail from me, or I may be new to you. I came on board as the new State CFRT Coordinator in late July 2006. In this initial newsletter issue, I want to share with you what brought me to this job and what I see us doing together for Texas kids.

I feel like my career has led me to Child Fatality Review (CFR). I began as

a CPS caseworker in Houston. In addition to my 9 years at CPS, I have worked for the Family Courts, CASA, the National Domestic Violence Hotline and now, 9 years at the Department of State Health Services, with 5 years as the DSHS Volunteer Coordinator and 4 years as lead trainer and conference planner for Texas Vital Statistics.

My background in advocacy and protection of children, along with years of volunteer

management and working in vital records, serve me well in this position.

I came to CFR at a critical time, and these 11 months have been non-stop activity and learning. After years with the Department of Family and Protective Services, CFR is now organized under DSHS Office of Title V & Family Health. New agency and coordinator, renewed focus on public health strategies, and more emphasis on prevention. (more on page 6)

## Save the Date: Annual Conference October 1 - 3

The State Child Fatality Review Team (SCFRT) Committee will again partner with the Houston Children's Assessment Center and others to host the *Protecting Texas Children Conference*. This year's conference theme is *The Power of Multi-Disciplinary Teams*.

The conference will be held at the Renaissance Houston Greenway Plaza Hotel, October 1 – 3.

The program is going to be dynamic, with multiple sessions devoted to specific CFRT issues, as

well as ample opportunity for CFRT Team members to network. Several SCFRT and CFRT members are active on the Program Planning Committee, chaired by Susan Rodriguez.

There will be some significant differences and innovations at this year's conference. It is one day longer. There will be a pre-conference meeting for all CFRT Coordinators on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Also planned is an evening reception for all CFRT attendees.

In order to promote attendance at this important training, DSHS is underwriting two attendees per team in addition to any team members who attend using the \$1,000 annual training budget. **PLEASE NOTE: Each team must send at least 2 to the conference in order to qualify for the annual training budget.**

Watch for e-mail notices about registration for this upcoming conference.

See you at the October conference!

## Prevention Focus on Water Safety in Harris County



Houston/Harris Co. CFRT member, Ella Buchanan, of the ME's office, moderates the April Pools Day program at an area YMCA.

For the second year, the Houston/Harris County CFRT has led the multi-disciplinary effort to host April Pools Day, a water safety and drowning prevention program.

On the chilly morning of April 14<sup>th</sup>, a diverse team gathered to present a wide array of information about water safety for children. Also at the event were all the major media outlets to film for local news.

Medical Center physicians talked about what happens in a drowning and how very little time it can take to change or end a child's life and the life of the family. Texas Parks and Wildlife demonstrated how to find the best fit in a child's life preserver. The Red Cross demonstrated CPR and YMCA staff talked about supervision.

Finally, the Houston Police Dept. demonstrated the technology and

manpower used to search for a drowning victim.

To learn more about the April Pools Day program and the how-to of organizing such a campaign, contact Houston/Harris County CFRT coordinator Stephani Adams at [sadams@hcpbes.org](mailto:sadams@hcpbes.org)



## Travis County CFRT Annual Report Released

*"We can't do anything to help the 140 children who died in 2006. We can absolutely do many things to help the children of 2007."*

*Ben Bentzin, president of the Center for Child Protection*

Every year, the Travis County CFRT compiles local CFRT data and releases an annual report at a press conference in April, Child Abuse Prevention Month. This year the event was held on the grounds of the Center for Child Protection on April 27<sup>th</sup>.

With speakers including Austin's mayor, the District Attorney, law enforcement, Child Protective Services and

more, the facts revealed through Child Fatality Reviews were shared with those in attendance.

The Travis Co. CFRT found a 20% increase in child deaths, with 140 children dying in 2006. The majority of children (96) died of natural causes.

Accidental child deaths were up 81% from 2005. For the first time in a decade, motor vehicle crashes were not the most

common cause of accidental death. That leading cause of child death in 2006 was asphyxiation, which killed 17 children.

In light of the review data, Mayor Will Wynn said "The demand for us is to set examples. Look after our children. Look after our neighbors' children."

Congratulations to the Travis County CFRT on a job well done!

To view the Travis County CFRT Annual Report, go to:

[http://www.centerforchildprotection.org/assets/Media Publications PDF/CFRT/cfrt06 ltrfinal-5-1-07.pdf](http://www.centerforchildprotection.org/assets/Media_Publications_PDF/CFRT/cfrt06_ltrfinal-5-1-07.pdf)

## Crimes Against Children Conference in August

The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Crimes Against Children Conference, sponsored by the Dallas Children's Advocacy Center and the Dallas Police Department

will be held in Dallas, August 13 – 16.

If your team has not used all of the \$1000 training budget for FY07 (which ends August 31<sup>st</sup>), this is

an outstanding event with attendees from all over the world in our Texas backyard.

For more information, see [www.dcac.org](http://www.dcac.org)



## The State of Child Fatality Review in Texas

Child Fatality Review is alive and well in Texas. Although the number of teams actively reviewing child deaths went through a decline several years ago, and even with the transition of CFR from DFPS to DSHS, the number of teams is now on the rise.

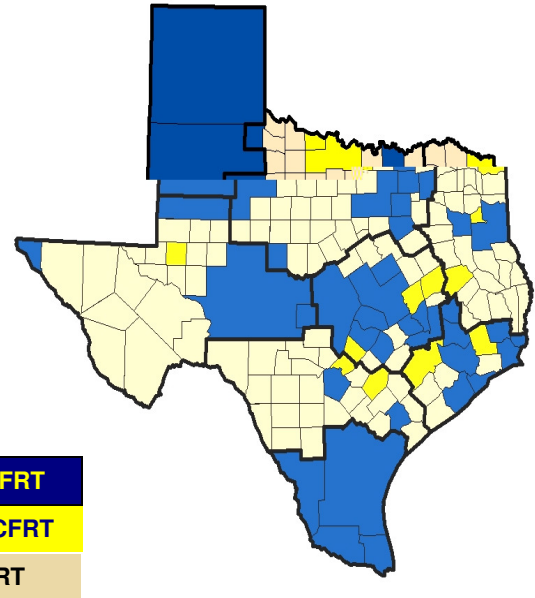
In 2007, there has been considerable growth. With the addition of two new teams in areas that have never had CFRTS (Grayson and Burleson counties) and the resumption of reviews in the multi-county Coastal Bend CFRT and in the Leon/Madison CFRT, the number of CFRTs has now reached 36, covering 126 counties.

There is more growth on the horizon. These new teams are in varying stages of development:

- Fort Bend County
- Nacogdoches County
- Cooke County
- Johnson County
- Kaufman/Rockwall Counties
- Tyler County
- Newton County
- Bosque County
- Hill County
- Limestone County

There are also plans to resume reviews in Hays, Liberty/Chambers and Colorado/Austin/Waller Counties.

### TEXAS CFRT MAP BY PUBLIC HEALTH REGION: JUNE 2007



Active CFRT

Inactive CFRT

No CFRT

## Update on 80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the 80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session came to a close. Two bills passed into law are of particular interest.

Senate Bill 802 addresses organizational changes in the SCFRT. The State Committee has always had 3 permanent members, and SB 802 names the Director of Title V Maternal and Child Health at DSHS as one of the permanent members. The legislation also adds to the list of required members, with the Dept. of Public Safety and the

Dept. of Transportation becoming mandated members. SB 802 also defines the staggered three year terms of SCFRT members.

Senate Bill 143 serves to establish Fetal and Infant Mortality (FIMR) Review Teams. The FIMR Teams have the purposes of improving the health and well-being of women, infants and families; to reduce racial disparities in the rates of fetal and infant mortality; and to develop and deliver

reports of findings to the community. These teams will review samples of fetal and infant deaths and will operate through Healthy Families programs.

Even though the session just ended, **NOW** is the time to think about and prepare for any legislative changes to be proposed in the 81<sup>st</sup> Session. If you have any burning issues you wish to be addressed by the Legislature, please contact the SCFRT Legislative Subcommittee through the Coordinator.



## The Power of the Well-Trained Team



CFRTs are made up of all sorts of professionals with specific expertise related to child death. There is much magic that happens when different disciplines come together to share information and learn from each other, to identify service gaps and to plan for how to reduce risk to children and prevent future deaths. That's why CFRT works!

Multi-disciplinary teams become even more effective when members continue to receive training and keep current on the latest information.

Training is essential, and can occur in many ways. You may request it from the State Coordinator. A team member may train on a specific topic. Local experts may address

unique issues. Harris Co. recently had an in-service by the county veterinarian in conjunction with reviews of deaths by dog mauling.

Each CFRT has an annual \$1000 allotment for reimbursement of CFRT-related training. Be sure your team makes the most of these professional development funds.

## Online Data Reporting System: Easy and Required

In September 2006, Texas became a participating state in the national Child Death Review database sponsored by the National Maternal and Child Health Center for Child Death Review.

The benefits of using the online system are many: the thoroughness and standardization of data collection; the ease of data entry; easy access to CFRT data to run team data reports; and Texas contribution to a national picture and understanding of child death.

All CFRTs were instructed to begin using the new Child Death Case Report that corresponds to the online reporting system. User names & passwords were assigned and CFRT Coordinators were

encouraged to begin entering their own team data.

Many of you are using the form and entering the data online. Some of you are using the form and submitting it to Bobby Schiener in Vital Statistics, where he enters the data. Both processes are acceptable.

There are some teams still not using the collection tool that corresponds to the national database. When data are not consistently collected, it is a time-consuming struggle to try to transcribe the information from the old Texas CFRT form to the national database. This also creates inaccuracies in the data as the two tools are not identical.

**Beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>, all reviews must be conducted using the new data collection tool.**

This form can be accessed at this link: [www.childdeathreview.org/reports/CDRCasereportform08092005.pdf](http://www.childdeathreview.org/reports/CDRCasereportform08092005.pdf)

Special thanks are extended to those teams that are entering CFRT data online: Bexar, Brazos, Cameron/Willacy, Central Texas, El Paso, Ellis, Hunt, Panhandle, South Plains, Travis, Tri-County and Williamson County CFRTs! If your team is leery of automation or wondering if it is right for you, please check in with one of these teams and learn how user-friendly the online reporting system is.



## Attorney General Rules on Open Records Requests for CFRT Reports

This year, Child Fatality Review has been the subject of Open Records requests from reporters in San Antonio and Houston.

When the first request for child abuse deaths in a given year and county was received in January, 2007, the agency attorney assigned to The Office of Title V & Family Health stated that the statute protects the information gathered by members of a CFRT but that the actual CFRT report is not confidential. Based on this legal interpretation of Texas Family Code § 264.511 (b), redacted reports without any identifying information were released.

The second Open Records request was much more extensive, asking for reports of all child abuse deaths in Texas since 2000. More conversations with agency attorneys ensued about the interpretation of the statute and the long-held belief that CFRT reports were confidential. It was felt that the earlier records were released erroneously. Ultimately, a ruling from the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) was sought to clarify the statute.

On June 6, 2007, the OAG ruled that this information is confidential under § 264.511(a) of the

Family Code and must be withheld from public disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code.

The cited statute states that "information and records acquired by the committee or by a review team in the exercise of its purpose and duties under this subchapter are confidential and exempt from disclosure under the open records law."

Should your CFRT be contacted with a request for CFRT information or reports, please refer the requestor to the State CFRT Coordinator.



## Make the Most of YOUR Newsletter!

This newsletter is a way that information can be shared about the latest in Child Fatality Review in Texas and the nation. It is an easy and economical way to get consistent information to you about policies, procedures, team successes and challenges facing teams and the program.

As the State Coordinator, the newsletter is a great way for me to take the questions you pose in e-mails, phone calls and review meetings and share the problem-solving process with all Texas

teams. In a program such as this, where teams operate independent of and with rare contact with each other, there are bound to be differences in how statute is interpreted, in how reviews are conducted, in how teams are structured.

The newsletter will be one avenue for discussing these issues and more.

Here's what I need from YOU . . . Send me:

- your questions, concerns, tales of success;

- photos of your team in action, projects, and events;
- topics you would like to see addressed in the newsletter; and/or
- information you want to share with other teams via the newsletter.



Call me at 512/458-7111 ext. 2311. E-mail me at [susan.rodriquez@dshs.state.tx.us](mailto:susan.rodriquez@dshs.state.tx.us).

Make this newsletter your own!

*Susan*

## Texas Child Fatality Review Team Program

### Susan Rodriguez

State Child Fatality Review Team Coordinator

Family Health Research & Program Development  
Office of Title V & Family Health  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
1100 W. 49<sup>th</sup> St  
Austin, TX 78756

PHONE: (512) 458-7111  
then dial "1" and ext. 2311

FAX: (512) 458-7443

E-MAIL:

[susan.rodriguez@dshs.state.tx.us](mailto:susan.rodriguez@dshs.state.tx.us)



We're on the Web!

See us at:

[www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/Child\\_Fatality\\_Review.shtm](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/Child_Fatality_Review.shtm)

## The SCFRT Committee Wants to Hear from YOU!

The State Child Fatality Review Team Committee is adding a new feature to their quarterly meetings in Austin: a presentation by a local CFRT about team activities, successes, issues and challenges. This is a way for the SCFRT Committee to stay in touch with issues impacting teams and a

way for your local CFRT to shine.

If you would like to meet with the SCFRT and tell the story and needs of your team, please notify Susan Rodriguez to be scheduled on the agenda.

Meetings are held from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

The SCFRT meetings scheduled for 2007 are as follows:

### SCFRT MEETINGS

9/7/07 AUSTIN

9/30/07 HOUSTON  
(pre-conference mtg.)

11/9/07 AUSTIN

## Meet the State CFRT Coordinator (continued from p. 1)

Working with the State Child Fatality Review Team Committee, I have many goals for expanding and strengthening the work of the local CFRTs, the quality of the data collected and the effectiveness of the prevention strategies that

arise out of the reviews conducted by the local teams.

As I travel around the state meeting with the different teams and attending reviews, this is what I've learned: This is important work. The

reviews are conducted by amazingly committed volunteers who want to see risk to Texas children reduced. We have a shared passion for keeping kids safe.

I'm so glad we're in this together!

### About Child Fatality Staff...

While there is only one DSHS staff member dedicated specifically to Child Fatality Review as the State Coordinator, there are other DSHS staff members who work on CFRT issues.

**Brian Castrucci** is the Director of Family Health Research and Program Development, where CFRT is housed.

**Dr. John Hellsten** is the epidemiologist who

analyzes & interprets the data collected by CFRTs.

**Bobby Schiener**, Vital Statistics, provides teams with death certificates, and maintains the database.

## State Child Fatality Review Team Committee

<b>Fouad Berrahou, PhD</b> Dept. of State Health Services	<b>Judge Judy Schier Hobbs</b> Williamson Co. Justice of the Peace	<b>Juan Parra, MD, MPH</b> UT Health Science Center at San Antonio
<b>Kim Cheung, MD, PhD</b> UT Health Science Center at Houston	<b>Sgt. Sandra Hutchinson</b> Austin Police Department	<b>Elizabeth Peacock, MD</b> Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office
<b>Trudy Deen Davis</b> Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas	<b>Joyce James, LMSW</b> Dept. of Protective & Family Services	<b>Terry Pence</b> Dept. of Transportation
<b>Sheriff Jack Ellett</b> Panola County Sheriff's Department	<b>Eric Levy, MD</b> Pediatric Critical Care Medicine	<b>Charly Skaggs</b> Juvenile Services for Williamson County
<b>Alice Gong, MD</b> UT Health Science Center at San Antonio	<b>Laurel Lindsey, JD</b> Dept. of Protective & Family Services	<b>Lt. Steven Tellez</b> Department of Public Safety
<b>Geraldine Harris, State Registrar</b> Dept. of State Health Services	<b>Donna Norris</b> Dept. of Protective & Family Services	<b>Raymond Teske, PhD</b> Sam Houston State University
<b>Elsa Hinojosa</b> Hays Consolidated School District	<b>Denise Oncken, JD, Chair</b> Harris Co. District Attorney's Office	<b>Sandi Wiggins, MPA</b> Denton County Public Health Department