

Study finds multiple hazards in 'home sweet home'

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A study of 1000 homes in Taranaki has found that many have hazards that result in claims to ACC costing millions of dollars a year as well as pain and suffering to individuals and their families.

The [University of Otago, Wellington](#) together with Better Homes, Taranaki carried out the research on behalf of the Accident Compensation Corporation, and has just completed its final report.

The study was commissioned to determine how injury hazards in the home could be reduced and to assess the cost effectiveness of making homes safer. It was carried out by the He Kainga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme at UOW.

It also looked at the prevalence of home hazards, whether they were associated with increased risk of injury and whether slip/trip/fall hazards can be associated with injury claims for slips, trips and falls.

The 'Taranaki Home Injury Hazards Study' found that three common home injury hazards could be fixed at very low cost.

Firstly, most houses studied did not have working smoke alarms; secondly, the hot water was turned up dangerously high in nearly 50% of homes, which could be changed by simply turning down the thermostat; thirdly, 20% of homes had a ranch slider or low windows without a safety visibility sticker or strip, which could result in serious injury.

"Fixing these hazards would reduce the risk of potentially serious injury in a home at virtually no cost to the householder," says lead investigator Dr Michael Keall. "We also found that for a modest cost of \$500, most householders could fix other injury hazards in their homes to make a significant difference in terms of reducing injury risk. As has been found in many other countries, we've confirmed that home injury in New Zealand is both common and costly."

The study analysed links between ACC claims for injuries in the home and injury hazards in those houses that were identified by a rating system developed from international systems to suit NZ housing; the Healthy Housing Index.

For instance it shows the rate of slip/trip/fall injuries increased by about 14% for each additional slip/trip/fall hazard in the house.

There were also many hazards assessed that were specific to children. For hazards unrelated to slips, trips and falls, the study found steeply increasing child injury risk with increasing numbers of home hazards, but no particular increase in injury rates for the population generally.

"This research is unprecedented internationally" says Dr Keall. "We hope to obtain funding from the Health Research Council to carry out a high quality community trial as a continuation of the study, which will provide a strong scientific and economic basis for further investment in home safety".

The importance of addressing injury hazards in the home will be covered in a seminar at the University of Otago Wellington on Tuesday February 17, including presentations by an international expert.

Professor David Ormandy from Warwick University UK will be speaking on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System in the UK, which his research team developed, as well as discussing the cost-effectiveness of reducing home injury hazards.

This seminar is part of the Summer School at the University of Otago, Wellington.

More details can be found at:

- <http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/academic/dph/summerschool/timetable.html>

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