

Blame Safety Strap In Death of Child

The death of 12-year-old Renee Meckler at Willowbrook State School resulted from the use of an improper safety device, Dr. Jack Hammond, director, revealed yesterday.

Administrative action against two employees responsible for the care of the severely retarded and physically handicapped girl is being considered.

District Attorney John M. Braisted said that evidence in connection with the child's death will be presented to the grand jury currently considering operations at Willowbrook.

"The child was strapped in

for safety, but it was not done the proper way," Hammond said.

The youngster, daughter of Mrs. Ethel Meckler of the Bronx, was strangled Monday when the device used to keep her from falling from the chair became entwined about her neck when she slipped through a wooden arm of the chair.

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"CERTAINLY, there was no intent to harm the child," the administrator said, "but an improper device was used to keep her from sliding out of the chair."

"That kind of device is not

permitted and our employees learn that in their training courses. We have special safety tests and safety harnesses that should be used."

The "makeshift arrangement" is not allowed for just such a reason that an accident could happen, Hammond noted.

Dr. Hammond expressed his regrets to the child's family. He also voiced confidence in the vast majority of his staff, but at the same time stated his determination to prevent lapses from occurring.

The child, who was also an epileptic, had to be strapped into the chair to be prevented from falling out, it was explained.

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DEATHS of two residents of the home in recent months from scalding showers have prompted a grand jury investigation into their circumstances.

In addition to presenting the case to the grand jury, Braisted said that he has asked for a complete police report and will conduct his own investigation into the circumstances.

Braisted said that the timetable for the grand jury inquiry calls for completing the probe of the first two deaths before the jury, which has been held over to Dec. 13, considers the latest incident.

Braisted disclosed that in conjunction with the probe of the two scaldings, he has hired a Staten Island engineering consultant, John Carlisle, to look into the matter of the plumbing at the institution.

Carlisle is already conducting tests of the system.