



Drowning Prevention – Ready Guard Program

Drowning is one of the largest exposures for all organizations that provide aquatic programming and offer aquatic facilities to their patrons, especially those organizations serving large youth populations. Children are the victims in nearly half (1,500) of all drownings in the US each year according to the Centers for Disease Control. Drowning is the second-leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1 to 14 years with nearly half of those children drowning in guarded pools. In addition to drownings, five times as many children are victims of near-drowning incidents.

Organizations have the responsibility to ensure that all children in their care are both properly nurtured and safe. Drownings and near drownings can cause harm to individuals, staff, the organization and the community when they occur. Sound aquatic risk management programs include regular Lifeguard in-service training, scanning and aquatic emergency drills, swim testing and color banding of all youth participants, proper ongoing supervision of Lifeguards, proper parental supervision of children and appropriate safety equipment and maintenance.

Safe-Wise Consulting has developed the Ready Guard program to assist organizations in managing the risks associated with the operation of aquatic programs and facilities. This comprehensive drowning prevention program builds strategies that protect children, staff and the organization. Drowning prevention has no single prevention technique. Ready Guard emphasizes the strategies that must be embraced starting with the leadership and continues throughout the organization in order to reduce the opportunities for drownings. These strategies are based on nationally recognized guidelines, principles and values.

The Ready Guard employs the following strategies to manage aquatic risk:

Policies - A thorough and comprehensive drowning prevention program must be in place in order to protect youth, families, staff, community and the organization itself. A comprehensive aquatics policy should be in effect that has been reviewed and adopted by the Board of Directors. This policy provides direction for the ongoing efforts of the organization. The Aquatics Policy and drowning prevention efforts should be evaluated each year to better understand their effectiveness and to adapt to current trends.

Training – Lifeguard certification itself cannot be considered sufficient training. New staff orientation and regular in-service training is necessary for all employed and volunteer aquatic staff. Training should focus on policies and procedures specific to the facility, rescue skills, victim recognition, vigilance capacity, emergency management, swimmer management. All skills, procedures and training should be reinforced by a regular program of drills. Documentation of new staff orientation, monthly in-service trainings and drills should be included in all employee and volunteer personnel files.

Emergency Management - Aquatic emergencies are among the most critical emergency situations in recreational facilities as suffocation by drowning compounds all other causes and conditions. Staff action in emergency situations is critical and time is of the essence. While clear water pools are more common in programming, open dark water areas such as lakes and waterfronts offer different challenges that must also be reviewed and planned for. Every aquatic location must have a comprehensive site-specific emergency action plan (EAP) that clearly defines roles for each staff member. The EAP should be rehearsed on a regular basis through emergency drills. The EAP should be included in all New Staff Orientations and in-service trainings for aquatic staff and non-aquatic emergency response staff. Local emergency personnel should review the EAP to ensure effectiveness and compliance with local protocols. EAP should include all response staff and the use of an AED trainer, Oxygen and a CPR manikin.

Swimmer Management - The primary role of a Lifeguard is to prevent drownings and the first rule in prevention of drownings is to pro-actively restrict non-swimmers and poor swimmers to shallow water. All youth and teens should be tested and color banded before entering the water with no exceptions. All non-swimmers and shallow water competent swimmers should be restricted to water no deeper than their shoulders. All non-swimmers should have a parent or guardian with them in the water within arm's reach and wear a US Coast Guard type II PFD. Many organizations are now swim testing and tracking all youth and teen swimmers, including all participants of outside groups like day camp, rental groups and birthday parties; with no exceptions. Lifeguards should include adults in ability testing procedures for all groups, parties, rentals, etc. Guards should be empowered to restrict pool access to shallow water for any individual that does not exhibit the proficiency necessary for deep water swimming.

Lifeguard Supervision – Lifeguard supervision is critical to the success of aquatic safety and the ongoing support of the Lifeguarding staff. It is estimated that victims were not initially identified by on-duty Lifeguards in as many as 70% of aquatic incidents. Regular Quick Checks by management staff (Manager on Duty) help insure that guards are vigilant, constantly scanning and are rescue ready at all times. Quick Checks should be documented providing the aquatic director with vital staff feedback. Regular visits to the pools by management also help develop a culture of safety and a report with the guards and patrons.

Parental Supervision – Parental supervision is critical to drowning prevention. Organizations should implement a policy requiring that children under a certain age (eg: 10 years) to be accompanied by a parent or guardian in the building. This policy should be strictly enforced in all areas of the facility, but is critical in an aquatics setting as supervision is key to drowning prevention. A child who passes the swim test still needs a parent or adult caregiver in the pool area. Although the parent may not need to be in the water they still have to be present to provide supervision for the child. Lifeguards are not babysitters and must be able to perform their primary duties for all participants.

Current Trends – Safe-Wise stays informed on current issues and trends involving aquatic safety and drowning prevention. We analyze this information to keep you current and informed. Current information can assist organizations in staying ahead of the curve and preventing aquatic incidents thereby protecting youth and others from harm.

More information on aquatic safety and drowning prevention is available in the [Safe-Wise Consulting Online Resource Library](#)