



Aquatic Safety Drills

Regular and unannounced drills are useful practices in maintaining a high level of aquatic readiness. These type of drills can help to reinforce victim recognition and scanning skills. Drills should be conducted to compliment monthly in-service training that includes an emphasis on victim recognition, scanning and the aquatic emergency action plan (EAP). Executing drills at different times of the day and week will help to ensure consistent practices whenever aquatic operations are offered; high usage times should not be avoided. All drills should be documented by an observer to record results and for later review. The EAP procedures should be reviewed and analyzed after the drill is conducted to determine effectiveness and implemented modification if necessary.

Scanning Drills

Red Ball Drill: this is a simple, time effective drill with a purpose of emphasizing surface scanning and lifeguard vigilance. This drill can easily be conducted during any aquatic activity without interrupting the flow of the operation.

Implementation: A swimmer, employee or other volunteer is instructed by a senior aquatic staff member or facility manager to release a 4 to 6 inch (in diameter) red ball into the pool in order to initiate the drill scenario. When the lifeguard scans and observes the red ball they should then thrust their fist into the air denoting recognition of the ball and completion of the drill scenario. A stop-watch can be used to measure the time from when the ball is introduced to the water and when it is recognized by the lifeguard. The goal is to have recognition of the object within the 10-20 second timeframe. Lifeguards who consistently score within the 10-20 second timeframe or less should be immediately praised and recognized/rewarded at a future staff meeting.

Red Puck Drill: this is a simple, time effective drill with a purpose of emphasizing bottom scanning and lifeguard vigilance. This drill can easily be conducted during any aquatic activity without interrupting the flow of the operation.

Implementation: A swimmer, employee or other volunteer is instructed by a senior aquatic staff member or facility manager to release a red (painted) hockey-sized puck into the pool in order to initiate the drill scenario. Similar objects may be used as long as they are not too large as to possibly be confused with a submerged distressed swimmer (When in Doubt, Fish it Out!). When the lifeguard scans and observes the puck they should then thrust their fist into the air denoting recognition of the puck and completion of the drill scenario. A stop-watch can be used to measure the time from when the puck is introduced to the water and when it is recognized by the lifeguard. The goal is to have recognition of the object within the 10-20 second timeframe. Lifeguards who consistently score within the 10-20 second timeframe or less should be immediately praised and recognized/rewarded at a future staff meeting.

Emergency & Training Drills

Disappearing Silhouette Manikin: this is a simple, effective training drill that can be utilized to aid in submerged distressed swimmer recognition under differing light conditions, agitation and guard orientation. This drill should be included as part of staff orientation and in-service training. This is not a drill that should be conducted during normal pool operations unless a lifeguard is on duty and not participating in the drill.

The purpose of this drill is to observe a submerged distressed swimmer under a variety of conditions; swimmer activity, different angles of light, agitation of the water surface, various obstructions such as lane lines and pool design features.

Implementation: A silhouette manikin should be placed on the pool bottom. All staff present should then be instructed to slowly walk with the leader around the pool deck keeping their eyes focused on the submerged manikin. The leader should point out how the manikin will “disappear” with the effects of glare and water agitation. Staff should also notice how the manikin disappears or becomes distorted when the water is agitated and below floating lane lines (the leader may also introduce volunteer “swimmers” into the pool to show how they may also inhibit identification of the silhouette). The leader should point out how the manikin disappears as staff move around the deck due to pool design features such as “L” shape designs, divider walls, “Lazy” rivers and water toys. Staff should observe the manikin from an elevated guard stand and see the tremendous improvement in bottom scanning ability. The drill should be repeated for two or more placements of the manikin based on the particular challenges of the pool. The manikin should be placed where it will best help emphasize the specific pool conditions that may limit effective scanning.

Silhouette Manikin Drill: this drill will assist in submerged distressed swimmer recognition within the 10-20 second timeframe. The drill will activate the aquatic emergency action plan and clear the pool.

The purpose of this drill is to emphasize bottom scanning and submerged distressed swimmer recognition within the 10-20 second timeframe. This drill may also involve other staff and patrons in understanding their role in aquatic emergency management.

Implementation: A skilled swimmer practiced in silhouette manikin placement is instructed by a senior aquatic staff member to deliver the silhouette to the pool bottom while either swimming or teaching. A signal indicating the silhouette has been released should be agreed upon (E.g. push hair back) and then a stop-watch is started. Once the lifeguard scans and observes the silhouette, the guard should follow the EAP, clear the pool and retrieve the manikin. The stop-watch is then stopped and elapsed time is recorded. A record of elapsed time should be maintained for each drill. Lifeguards who consistently recognize within the 10-20 second timeframe or less should be immediately praised and recognized/rewarded at a future staff meeting. **Note:** Whenever an unknown object is observed on the pool bottom it should be assumed to be a possible distressed swimmer. The EAP should be activated and the object should be removed; when in doubt – fish it out. The drill should be unannounced and a staff member should be assigned to stop 911/EMS from being activated.

Red Cap Drill: this drill will assist in distressed swimmer recognition, within the 10-20 second timeframe, in a dark water environment. The drill will activate the aquatic emergency action plan and clear the swimming area.

The purpose of this drill is to emphasize scanning, distressed swimmer recognition and emergency response preparedness. This drill may also involve other staff and patrons in understanding their role in aquatic emergency management. Many dark water locations have adopted this drill procedure as part of their training program in order to effectively prepare for drowning emergencies.

Implementation: This drill utilizes a volunteer/staff swimmer and a red swim cap to activate the EAP. The swim cap may be labeled in such a manner as to make it distinctive; such as marking with a large black "X". The drill scenario should be reviewed during staff orientations and regular in-service trainings. The swimmer should subtly submerge and place the red cap on their head before surfacing while the aquatic area is open and active. They may assume a prone float position in the water, simulating an unconscious, non-breathing or otherwise passive distressed swimmer. The lifeguard on duty should recognize the red capped swimmer within the 10-20 second timeframe and activate the EAP. A stop-watch may be used to record the elapsed time of the drill. Lifeguards who consistently recognize a swimmer within the 10-20 second timeframe or less should be immediately praised and recognized/rewarded at a future staff meeting.

Notes for Conducting Emergency Action Plan Drills

Drills that activate the EAP are best practiced in conjunction with the use of a CPR manikin, an AED Trainer, emergency supplemental oxygen and suction. Once the manikin or "swimmer" has been safely removed from the water they should be replaced by an appropriate device so resuscitation can be demonstrated; rescue breathing, CPR, AED use, oxygen administration and suction. The entire EAP should be activated up to the point of notifying 911 or activating the local EMS, unless it has been previously arranged for their inclusion in this drill.

Drill should generally be unannounced to staff. Notice may be posted to alert patrons that drills may be conducted during a specific timeframe. A staff member should be assigned to stop 911/EMS from being activated.

Additional aquatic safety resources are available in the Safe-Wise Consulting [Online Resource Library](#).