

Safety InsightsSM

Safety & Risk Management News & Notes

VOLUME NUMBER 1 — ISSUE 1

Preparing for a Summer of Aquatic Safety

The outdoor swim season is one of the busiest for YMCAs and many have already begun the changeover to seasonal lifeguards for indoor and outdoor locations. Associations may completely change their aquatic staff for the season and will experience high rates of use in outdoor facilities over the next few weeks and throughout the summer.

Recent statistics show that in 75% of all drownings (where a guard was present), the victim was initially identified by someone other than the guard. Also, 88% of children who drown in the US are under supervision. Because of statistics like these, YMCAs must prepare for the summer cautiously and ensure that their guard staff is well-trained, alert and proactive. Preseason training is not sufficient; regular procedures must be implemented to maintain a well-trained, skilled, and vigilant staff.

Safe-Wise encourages the following practices to ensure quality supervision in aquatic venues.

Ready Guards: *Are your lifeguards exhibiting these behaviors?*

- Wearing apparel that designates them as the guard and that is appropriate for guarding
- Actively scanning their area completely within 10 seconds and able to get to a victim under water within 10 seconds (*no other responsibilities while on guard duty*)
- Wearing a rescue tube, CPR mask, gloves and whistle on their person at all times while on duty
- Positioned to provide clear observation of the pool bottom and surface of all areas of their assigned zone of coverage

Emergency Preparedness: *Are you prepared for emergencies?*

- Review of the written, site specific, emergency action plan (*regularly*)
- Regular, documented emergency drills with all guards and emergency response staff (*varied scenarios*)
- In-service training for aquatic staff (*weekly for the summer*)
- Pools equipped with the appropriate emergency equipment such as reaching poles, backboard, oxygen, AED, bag valve mask, suction, first aid supplies, phone/radio and emergency alarm (*checked weekly*)

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Welcome to Safety Insights

Safe-Wise Consulting is proud to present the first issue of its monthly e-newsletter. Future issues will focus on current safety and risk management ideas for YMCAs while providing information on trends, good practices and available resources.

Safe-Wise Consulting offers insightful safety and risk management consulting services to YMCAs. Our staff consultants have extensive local and national experience in Y leadership, along with strong safety and risk management knowledge. This combination of proven career YMCA directors with operations-based experience and strong safety knowledge uniquely enables Safe-Wise to provide consulting, training and support services to Ys that encourage effective, practical and sustainable organizational processes.

Our services focus on key exposures including: aquatic safety, child abuse prevention, employee safety and general practices and asset protection. Our goal is to support your Y's mission driven efforts while strengthening practices that ensure safety and responsible management of risks for the organization, staff and community.

To learn more about Safe-Wise

Emergency Preparedness: Are you prepared for emergencies?

- Guards' skills and emergency preparedness are tested at the time of hire and/or at the beginning of the season

Supervision: How do you supervise?

- Hourly observation of lifeguards
- Regular rotations and breaks for lifeguards (*Indoor: 15 minutes every two hours, Outdoor: 10 minutes every hour*)
- Appropriate guard to swimmer ratios for each activity (*minimum 1:25*)
- Sun and weather protection for guards
- Elevated guard stands (*seat height of 5 foot minimum*)

With careful preparation and regular supervision, a safe summer of fun is coming to a Y pool or lake near you! ♦

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Experience • Knowledge • Insight

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Take the Shock out of Severe Weather

Many parts of the US are currently entering severe weather seasons and others will soon follow. An active hurricane season in the Atlantic basin, with landfall storms at above-average levels, has been predicted. This information along with recent news events about storm destruction and lightning strikes, should alert Ys to prep for weather emergencies.

Ys need to include weather emergencies in their planning. Plans should include prevention, reaction, safety measures and recovery components. Plans should address weather hazards that are prevalent and/or common in your region. The staff at Safe-Wise is able to help develop a plan for your association that will help protect your assets and control losses. Your staff will be prepared and able to react to all emergencies through careful preparation and proper communication.

New resources are available for tracking lightning activity. These tools will be particularly helpful as the busy summer lightning season approaches. The Strike Alert lightning detector is one option and can help identify approaching storms. New weather tracking technologies can also be utilized by Ys through their computer systems and remotely via cell phones. These internet-based programs allow real-time tracking of hazardous weather conditions and can cost as little as \$10 per month. These programs are currently being used by NASA, the PGA Tour and BSA; preferred pricing has been arranged for YMCAs and other non-profits. Safe-Wise can connect you with the right resource for your association.

Facility and maintenance staff should be prepared for storm damage to building and grounds. Prevention plans for upcoming storm activity should be reviewed annually. Your association's emergency plan should include contingencies for storm damage, power outages and possible site evacuations. Damage can be controlled by ensuring that proper preventative maintenance activities are performed. Wild fires are another common summer emergency; grounds and buildings should be maintained in a manner to provide fire buffers to reduce damage.

Whatever method your YMCA uses for emergency preparation, it is important to thoroughly review all resources and ensure that all staff is aware of their role in prevention and safety measures. YMCAs can enjoy a safer summer through effective preparation and planning. ♦

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

Lightning Alert Program - A service designed to notify group leaders when a thunderstorm threatens their program by alerting them when lightning strikes within 6 miles of their location. Visit www.struckbylightning.org for more. ♦

When the Temperature Rises, So Does the Danger of Heat Sickness

Activities in hot environments can cause a range of ailments from discomfort to death. It's essential that staff members understand the risks and how to protect against them. The two most serious forms of heat-related illnesses are heat exhaustion (primarily from dehydration) and heat stroke. People who exhibit signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke need immediate attention. Here are possible heat-related health hazards, along with how to avoid them, how to recognize them and how to cope with them if they occur.

Heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion is a common response to strenuous activity in the heat. It is characterized by weakness, dizziness and/or nausea. Victims may have chills, with clammy skin and profuse sweating. The treatment is to rest in a cool spot—preferably with the feet slightly elevated—and drink liquids.

Heatstroke. This most serious type of heat sickness is life threatening, so great care should be taken that the effects of heat never reach this stage. The victim's perspiration and its cooling action stop, skin may be hot to the touch, and poor coordination may be evident, possibly followed by collapse.

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The Right Culture at Camp

As camp professionals prepare for summer there are new child abuse prevention issues facing their camps. Hazing, peer abuse and choking games may not be prevalent, but they are in the news, and YMCAs must be on guard to prevent these and other abuses at camp.

Some issues to be considered when developing training content include managing free time, controlling the use of cameras (digital photos) and looking out for new trends. YMCAs should include the following in their summer preparations:

- Staff training on child abuse prevention and behavior management
- Staff and camper behavior expectations, which are communicated to parents, campers and staff
- Position on appropriate use of cameras and other imaging devices at camp
- Policies on staff and camper interaction via email and instant messaging
- Supervision plans for time between activities, cabin time and evenings

Additional information on YMCA child abuse prevention is available at the YMCA Services Corporation's Website (www.yserVICEScorp.com), at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center's Website (www.nonprofitrisk.org) and by contacting Safe-Wise Consulting for printed resources and onsite training programs. ♦

Who's in the Pool?

Recent statistics show that almost 80% of YMCA aquatic incidents involve participants under the age of 18 and 58% involve children under age ten.

YMCAs use a variety of methods to assist in aquatic supervision, from increased number of guards, to computerized monitoring systems to various buddy systems. These methods prove to be effective and many incidents are prevented or at least their magnitude is reduced.

Organized programs such as camps and childcare often fare better when it comes to supervision. Regulations require specific practices and supervision levels that help reduce incidents. Children are also usually swim tested and their pool access is appropriate to their swimming ability.

What about recreational swims? Does your YMCA test all participants during its scheduled open recreational swims? Are there rules in place that require pre-school age children to be accompanied by an adult, in the water, for family swim times? Recreational and family swim times are sometimes "exceptions" to good aquatic safety practices at YMCAs. It is not uncommon for a weekend swim time to be supervised by one lifeguard.

YMCAs should review their swim schedules and ensure that proper supervision ratios are in place, that parents accompany children during family swims and that swim testing is conducted and documented for all recreational swims. ♦

The proper response is to put the victim in a cool place and summon medical care. While awaiting EMS, sponge the victim with cold water, apply ice packs, or immerse the victim in cold water. Continue these efforts until help arrives.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) produces a "Heat Stress Card," which lists tips for preventing many heat-related deaths and injuries. Available in English and Spanish, this laminated fold-up card is free to YMCAs to distribute to their staffs.

Information in this article is not meant to take the place of proper training. Safe-Wise Consulting offers on-site training and can assist YMCAs in developing their employee safety and accident prevention program. ♦

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Knowing an Applicant's Past Helps Protect Your Future

Some YMCAs have learned that staff applicants are not always truthful or forthcoming during the application process. Thorough background checks of job candidates may be time-consuming; however, many YMCAs have discovered the value of knowing who they are hiring. Consider these guidelines when you interview job applicants:

- All prospective employees and volunteers should be required to complete and sign an application that meets federal, state and local laws.
- Always check personal and employment references. To address privacy concerns, always obtain the applicant's written agreement to perform a complete background check. This agreement must comply with the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).
- If a prior employer seems reluctant to release information about an applicant, make a written record of the situation. This will establish that an attempt was made to obtain references. This may also raise a "Red flag" and encourage additional screening.
- Request copies of any professional licenses, certifications or degrees that an applicant indicates that he or she has obtained.
- Use the job interview to resolve any doubts about information on the employment application.
- When conducting a phone reference check, complete a form, then sign and file it. All inquiries and information should be documented in the record. Include telephone inquiries and interviews with professional and personal references and prior employers, as well as notes from the job interview. Written references should always be verified by phone.
- Criminal checks should be performed. A release must be obtained prior to obtaining this information. State level checks may not always be effective and timely; professional services may be a more efficient resource.
- Local, state or federal requirements must be met for applicants who will work in child-care, educational and camp programs.

Safe-Wise Consulting is available to assist YMCAs in developing their screening and other child abuse prevention practices through printed resources, electronic communication and onsite consultation or training programs. ♦

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

Sexual Offender Registry Online - 90% of sexual abuse victims know their abusers. In most abuse cases a rapport and trust has been built over a period of time. Every effort must be made to verify the appropriateness of staff and volunteers that interact with youth; offender registries are a part of a good screening process. Visit www.protect.org to access your state's online registry. ♦