

Safety InsightsSM

Safety & Risk Management News & Notes

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Depending on Buddies

YMCAs have long been a leader and resource for group swimming. Many adults fondly remember their childhood experiences; swimming with friends at a Y pool or camp. New memories are created each and every day at YMCA pools and waterfronts across the country. However, current trends show that groups, events and recreational swim times make up one of the greatest aquatic safety risks at Ys. Nearly seventy percent of all YMCA drownings since 2002 have occurred during recreational and/or group swims. A majority of near-drownings occurred during these times as well.

YMCAs must become more proactive with their aquatic safety practices during recreational and group swim times. All youth participants must have their swim abilities tested. After testing, a swimmer's use of the aquatic venue must be controlled in accordance to their ability and all swimmers should wear something to designate this ability level. Colored swim caps, breakaway neck-bands and even temporary tattoos are effective in designating the swim abilities of participants. The use of buoy or "Lemon" lines should be implemented to establish swimming areas for each ability level.

Lifeguards should not be distracted with testing during swim times, but rather should test prior to the swim time or Ys should provide an additional guard to perform testing in a designates area. Swim test results should be recorded to enable swimmers to participate more effectively in the future.

The use of the "Buddy System" is an extremely effective method for assisting guards with aquatic safety and victim recognition. All participants from a group should be coupled with another swimmer of similar ability. These "Buddies" should stay within arms reach of one another throughout the swim period. The "Buddy" system is an effective way of encouraging the Core Value of responsibility because "Buddies" are responsible for one another. If one "Buddy" is in trouble, the other can easily alert a lifeguard.

"Buddy Checks" should be performed throughout the swim time at regular intervals. All participants should pair up with their "Buddy" when a check is signaled by the lifeguard. Participants should grasp their "Buddy's" hand above their heads as a guard count pairs. Other guards can scan the area as "Buddies" stand at the water's edge or sit on the pool deck-edge. An efficient "Buddy Check" can be the goal of staff and participants.

Safe-Wise Consulting provides the *Ready-Guard* Program which can effectively implement sustainable aquatic safety practices at YMCAs. ♦

Safe-Wise at AYP

Safe-Wise Consulting will be attending the National AYP Conference in Boston on July 18th - 21st. Our booth (#105) will provide valuable information about the type of services and support that Safe-Wise provides YMCAs.

In addition to being able to learn more about Safe-Wise, attendees will have the opportunity to enter into a raffle to win a "Code Blue" response bag. The "Code Blue" bag contains the necessary emergency equipment that is needed for response to a life-threatening incident at your YMCA.

Booth #105 will also be the place to have a ball! Safe-Wise will be distributing information about our "Red Ball" drill procedures to monitor aquatic safety and vigilance at your Y. Sample procedures and a red ball for use in the drill will be available to all attendees that stop by the booth.

Safe-Wise Consulting utilizes the enterprise approach to risk management which when thoughtfully applied enables your Y to deliver its mission to the community effectively. We employ sound, practical and time-proven risk management strategies in a creative fashion that encourage a culture of safety and manage your association's risks effectively.

Please stop in booth #105 at AYP to learn more. ♦

Lightning Alert System

Summer is lightning strike season. All Ys should have a plan for dealing with lightning storms when operating pools (indoor and outdoor) and outdoor programs.

Struck by Lightning has recently worked in conjunction with organizations to provide a lightning alert program for youth agencies such as Boy Scouts and YMCAs.

The alert program is a tool to notify those responsible for the safety of children that a storm is in the immediate area so that a lightning safety plan can be immediately initiated.

More information about the alert program as well as educational resources is available at www.struckbylightning.com. ♦

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Recreational Water Illnesses

Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs) are illnesses that are spread by swallowing, breathing, or having contact with contaminated water from swimming pools, spas, lakes, rivers, or oceans. RWIs can cause a wide variety of symptoms, including gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic and wound infections. The most commonly reported RWI is diarrhea. RWIs can be spread through use of swimming pools, hot tubs, decorative water fountains, oceans, lakes, and rivers.

The most common illness spread through use of swimming pools is diarrhea. If swimmers are ill with diarrhea, the germs that they carry can contaminate the water if they have an "accident" in the pool. On average, people have about 0.14 grams of feces on their bottoms which, when rinsed off, can contaminate recreational water. When people are ill with diarrhea, their stool can contain millions of germs. Therefore, swimming when ill with diarrhea can easily contaminate large pools or waterparks. As a result, if someone swallows water that has been contaminated with feces, he/she may become sick. Many of these diarrhea-causing germs do not have to be swallowed in large amounts to cause illness. To ensure that most germs are killed, chlorine or other disinfectant levels and pH should be checked regularly as part of good pool operation.

The most common illnesses in hot tubs and spas are skin infections like "hot tub rash". Chlorine and other disinfectant levels evaporate more quickly because of the higher temperature of the water in the tubs. Respiratory illnesses are also associated with hot tub use if the hot tub is not well maintained. Because of this it is important to check disinfectant levels even more regularly than in swimming pools. "Hot tub rash" can also be spread in pools and at the lake or beach.

Lakes, rivers, and oceans can become contaminated with germs from sewage, animal waste, water runoff following rainfall, fecal accidents, and germs rinsed off the bottoms of swimmers. It is important to avoid swallowing the water because natural recreational water is not disinfected. Avoid swimming after rainfalls or in areas identified as unsafe by health departments. Contact your state or local health department for results of water testing in your area or go to EPA's beach site or their National Health Protection Survey of Beaches.

The spread of RWIs can be managed through preventive measures, good pool maintenance and quick reaction to accidents/incidents. YMCAs should post and enforce pool use rules that discourage use by participants that are ill, require protective pants for infants, challenged or incontinent individuals and require showering prior to pool use. Chlorine or other disinfectant methods should be maintained at proper levels and monitored regularly. Each YMCA should have written procedures in place for dealing with fecal and other contamination incidents.

More information about RWIs can be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the YMCA of the USA and Safe-Wise Consulting. ♦

Managing Electrical Hazards in Your Office

Walk into any program or administration office and you will see any number of computers, printers, monitors, scanners, lamps, CD players, cell phones and iPod chargers. These and other electronic devices are typically all plugged into one inexpensive, overloaded power strip.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) cautions that this type of situation is extremely dangerous. According ESFI, overloaded electrical circuits pose both an electrocution and fire hazard. Adding additional outlets is often impractical, so ESFI recommends the following tips for electrical safety.

- ◆ If you must use a power strip, use a name-brand product from a reputable retailer. Low-quality or counterfeit power strips may contain wiring that isn't adequate to carry the load.
- ◆ Place power strips where there is plenty of air circulation to disperse heat.
- ◆ Do not attempt to plug grounded (three-prong) cords into ungrounded (two-slot) outlets.
- ◆ Do not bind, kink or knot electrical cords.
- ◆ Never run power cords under rugs or where chairs can roll over them.
- ◆ Keep cords close to a wall to avoid trip hazards.
- ◆ Keep all non-critical electrical items unplugged until you need to use them.
- ◆ Consider charging battery-operated devices in another area.
- ◆ If your computer screen flickers or fades, or you detect a burning smell, power down and immediately contact maintenance staff.
- ◆ Ensure that a licensed electrician conducts a regular electrical inspection.

More electrical safety information is available from YUSA Facility Consulting and the Electrical Safety Foundation International (www.electrical-safety.org). ◆

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

The non-profit **Electrical Safety Foundation** promotes electrical safety. Each year, hundreds die and thousands are injured by electrical hazards—most of which could be prevented. Know the basics of electrical safety awareness by visiting www.electrical-safety.org ◆

Don't Stress with Summer Heat

Summer's hot weather is here and with warmer temperatures, staff that work outdoors should be especially careful of the sun, heat and other hazards brought on by the summer climate.

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) recommends the following tips to reduce the risk of heat stress.

- ◆ Know symptoms of heat illnesses including headaches, dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting.
- ◆ Block out direct sun and other heat sources.
- ◆ Use cooling fans/air-conditioning, shade and rest regularly.
- ◆ Wear a wide-brim hat, cap or bandana, and sunglasses that block UV rays.
- ◆ Drink plenty of cool water; about a cup every 15 minutes.

OSHA resources, such as the *Heat Stress QuickCard*® (in English and Spanish) and *Protecting Yourself in the Sun* pocket card (in English and Spanish) offer additional tips for YMCAs and staff on preventing injury and illness while working in hot weather.

Program Directors and managers of outdoor aquatic facilities should include protection procedures in their in-service training programs for lifeguard staff. Lifeguards should be reminded to protect themselves from the effects of the sun and heat in order to prevent injury along with being able to maintain a high level of aquatic vigilance. ◆

Working with People with Disabilities

YMCAs are inclusive organizations that welcome all individuals regardless of age, income, background and ability. Meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities or special needs is both a legal and ethical responsibility of YMCAs according to the YMCA of the USA Legal Council's office. Information for working effectively with individuals with disabilities is available on Y Exchange. This information includes links to resources for staff, volunteers and organizational policies.

Many YMCAs struggle with the challenges of adapting to include all individuals. Policies and education programs should be in place to support staff as they interact with interested participants. Safe-Wise works with Ys to manage these challenges creatively and effectively. ♦

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Conducting Emergency Drills

Emergency drills are an effective technique for preparing YMCAs for stressful situations and ensuring that crises are handled effectively. Many YMCAs have reduced the injuries and chaos that can accompany an emergency because they have been prepared through their drill program.

Drills should be run at least every quarter, including a full evacuation drill at least twice a year. The best times to run an evacuation drill are when the weather permits, but allows enough time to pass where people will need the training. In some areas, such as child care, the department is required by the local jurisdiction to run evacuation drills every month. Check with authorities to determine which drills must be done and how frequently.

Local emergency personnel (EMS) should review all emergency procedures and be invited to participate in and observe drills. YMCAs that have involved their areas' emergency medical services with at least one drill annually have enhanced their emergency capabilities and fostered strong relationships in their communities. When conducting a drill the Y should always remember to notify the local EMS prior to activating any alarms. All drill procedures should be documented and distributed to all staff members.

All drills should be documented for future reference and at least one person should strictly observe the drill and take notes. After the drill is conducted, the procedures should be analyzed to determine if they are effective, and procedures should be modified if necessary. During a drill, special attention must be paid to evaluating how all departments interact. It is important to evaluate how effectively written procedures reflect actual behaviors.

Drills should be performed for situations that may occur at a particular YMCA. Some examples include aquatic emergencies, bomb threats, custody issues with children, heart attack (fitness center or class) and workplace violence. Creating a scenario-based drill program that encourages the interaction of several YMCA departments is a very effective way of preparing for an actual emergency.

Drills may be conducted at times when the YMCA is not busy, or members may be notified in advance that drills are to be conducted during certain intervals. Members may resist taking part in the drills, but they should be generally informed of the drills ahead of time. Most drills are for staff preparation as opposed to member education. The YMCA may want to conduct the drill as a surprise to everyone (except a few people) to more effectively evaluate the level of preparedness.

More information about developing emergency procedures and an effective drill program is available from Safe-Wise Consulting. ♦