



Hot Topics in Aquatic Safety

Commitment - Aquatic safety is not rest only the responsibility of Lifeguards. Organizations must have an awareness and commitment for the highest level of safety from staff and volunteer leadership. This commitment includes the adoption of an association aquatic policy that outlines the practices that should be in place to prevent aquatic accidents and to effectively manage all aquatic activities. Resources must accompany the commitment to ensure that the policy becomes practice.

Supervision & Training - The staff member responsible for aquatic activities must be properly certified and sufficiently experienced to manage the ongoing program and safety efforts of the aquatic policy. This would include leading monthly in-service training for all lifeguard staff. Training should reinforce guarding techniques such as 10/10 scanning, zone coverage, victim recognition and the concept of *Rescue Ready*. Emergency procedures and lifesaving techniques should also be reviewed regularly. Documented situational emergency drills should be regularly conducted with aquatic staff and also include all support staff on at least a quarterly basis. Local EMS should review all site-specific aquatic emergency plans and be invited to join in on a situational drill at least annually.

Vigilance - Lifeguards must be well trained and supervised. Organizations should implement a practice of hourly documented lifeguard observation. This practice will maintain a high level of awareness for aquatic safety throughout the staff and also ensure that guards are vigilant, *Rescue Ready*, properly positioned, maintaining appropriate guard-to-swimmer ratios and that facility safety, including lighting and water clarity, are appropriate for the aquatic activities. Guards should rotate their position and be scheduled for breaks in accordance with industry guidelines. Scanning spot checks such as “Red Cap” or “Red Ball” drills should be conducted regularly.

Facilities - Facilities must be well maintained and ventilated, and decks should be free of clutter. Lifeguard stands should be available for use by staff. Guard stands should have a minimum seat height of 5-feet from the deck; folding and lawn chairs are not appropriate for this use. Chemicals should be properly stored in a secure area. Chemical use and storage areas must be equipped with ANSI compliant eye wash stations, include posted MSDS, and handling procedures should meet OSHA standards. Aquatic areas should be equipped with or have immediate access to at least an AED, Emergency Supplemental Oxygen, manual suction and other mandated safety equipment. All aquatic venues should be equipped with an emergency push-button type alarm system that enunciates in both the aquatic area and in a manner that will alert other staff to activate the organization’s aquatic emergency plan. Documented tests and inspections of alarms and equipment should be conducted on a weekly basis.

Swimmer Management - Swim testing should be conducted for at least all youth, groups and special events. No swimmer should be allowed to participate in deep-water (over their head) activities without their swimming ability being confirmed and documented by aquatic staff. Non-swimmers should not be allowed in the water unless they are wearing a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device and are within arms-reach of a parent or guardian at all times. A system for recording and recognition (wrist bands, etc.) of swim ability should be implemented so that guard staff can easily identify the ability of patrons. Guard to swimmer ratios should never exceed 1:25 and in many cases should be lower; such as with special events, public swims and programs for the challenged. Breath-holding activities should be strongly discouraged during all group, lap, open and recreational swim times.

Other aquatic safety resources and the Ready Guard program are available from Safe-Wise Consulting.