Water Watcher by AOAP: Designation Guide

What is a Water Watcher?

A Water Watcher is a responsible individual who is designated to provide constant, direct, and uninterrupted supervision whenever people, especially children, are in or near water. The “Water Watcher by AOAP” program, endorsed by the Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP), raises awareness about drowning prevention and promotes vigilant supervision during aquatic activities.

Who Can and Should Be a Water Watcher?

- **Any Responsible Adult or Teenager:** The ideal Water Watcher is a capable, alert, sober adult or mature teenager who understands the importance of the role.
- **Not the Lifeguard On Duty:** The Water Watcher supplements, but does not replace, professional lifeguards.
- **Someone Willing to Abstain from Distractions:** The person must agree to avoid all distractions and focus solely on supervision.

Why Having a Water Watcher is Important

- **Drowning is Quick and Silent:** Drowning can happen in less than 30 seconds and often without splashing or calling for help. Children can lose consciousness in as little as two minutes.
- **Distractions are Deadly:** Routine distractions like phones, conversations, and chores can have tragic consequences. Designation ensures accountability.
- **Shared Responsibility Reduces Tragedy:** When everyone assumes “someone else is watching the water,” supervision lapses. Designation prevents this diffusion of responsibility (the “bystander effect”).
- **AOAP Recommendations:** The AOAP and other safety organizations strongly recommend always designating a Water Watcher during aquatic activities to prevent drownings.

The Water Watcher by AOAP Card

- **Wear the Card:** The designated Water Watcher should wear the official AOAP Water Watcher card around their neck, making their role visible and reminding them (and others) of their critical responsibility.
- **Switching Water Watchers:** Water Watchers must trade the card and responsibility with another alert adult every 15–30 minutes to prevent lapses due to fatigue or distraction.

Duties and Expectations

- **Constant, Direct, Uninterrupted Supervision:**
  - Watch the water at all times. Do NOT read, use your phone, talk with others, engage in chores, eat, or leave your post for any reason while on duty.
  - Stay within arm’s reach of young children and weak swimmers.
  - Count and keep track of all swimmers frequently.
- **Eliminate All Distractions:**
  - Keep your phone put away unless needed for emergency use.
  - Avoid all conversation not related to supervision of the swimmers.
  - Do not consume alcohol or impairing substances.
- **Know Emergency Procedures:**

- Be prepared to respond quickly in case of trouble.
- Know the location of safety equipment, first aid supplies, and how to call for help.
- Call 911 immediately if a swimmer is missing or unresponsive.

How to Switch Water Watchers

- **Every 15–30 Minutes:** Fatigue and complacency can set in quickly. Switch roles regularly, passing the AOAP Water Watcher card to the next responsible adult.
- **Communicate Clearly:** Ensure the new Water Watcher is attentive, understands the duties, and is willing to remain distraction-free during their shift.

Key Points to Remember

- **Never Assume Someone Else is Watching.** Designate a Water Watcher every time.
- **Drowning Happens Fast—Stay Focused.**
- **Be Visible.** Wear the Water Watcher by AOAP card around your neck.
- **Rotate Often.** Switch every 15–30 minutes.
- **No Distractions.** No phones, socializing, chores, or substances.
- **Know What to Do in an Emergency.**

Additional Resources

- Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP) Water Watcher Program
- Water Safety USA – Designate a Water Watcher

Water Watchers save lives. Your attention is the best protection.