Association of Aquatic Professionals

Summer Aquatic Safety Reminders & Worksheet

The busy summer swim season is upon us. Typically, many aquatic venues see high rates of use over the summer months. The AOAP Drowning Prevention Committee has produced this annual summer aquatics safety resource to help aquatic professionals prepare for a safe and enjoyable summer swim season.

Plan for the summer cautiously and ensure lifeguards are well prepared and trained with updated practices and procedures. Recognize, many patrons who visit pools may not have proficient swimming skills; work to eliminate the risk of drowning for these patrons by swim-testing all swimmers, requiring specific protections for non-swimmers, and offering water safety training and swimming instruction whenever possible. Take action today to manage your aquatic environment and promote a culture of water safety at your facility!

DROWNING PREVENTION BEST PRACTICES:

- Provide a swim test for all participants; inability to swim is the **primary cause** of drowning.
- Have a sufficient supply of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) life jackets (PFDs) of various sizes available for use.
- Consider requiring (USCG) life jackets for poor and non-swimmers; most pool incidents occur in shallow water and many children may be out of their depth in the deeper sections of the shallow water.
- Implement a safety swim test and swim-level identification (bands, caps, etc.) protocol. Consider restricting poor and non-swimmers to chest-deep water or less, with additional protection in place (wearing a life jacket and/or within arm's reach of an adult).
- Promote and encourage the Association of Aquatic Professional's R.E.S.P.E.C.T the Water Drowning Prevention Campaign and Water Watcher by AOAP. Consider providing Water Watcher by AOAP Cards at your facility to help promote the importance of always having a Water Watcher, even if there are lifeguards on duty.
- Implement, educate and enforce a No Breath Holding activity policy.
- Consider the use of technology to assist lifeguards with drowning prevention.

Drowning Prevention Best Practices ACTION items identified:

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LIFEGUARD RECOMMENDATIONS:

The **primary** responsibility of a lifeguard is to **prevent** drowning. To prevent drowning, lifeguards must assess, not just scan, the behavior of everyone in their area of responsibility and quickly respond when something does not look right.

To increase the safety of those in the water, take steps to ensure that:

- Lifeguards are positioned at the water's edge so they can effectively scan the bottom, middle and surface of all their assigned water area/zone with nothing hindering their view (e.g., glare, backstroke flags, people walking in front, etc.).
- Lifeguards with active surveillance duties have no other responsibilities than to scan and monitor swimmers. **Note:** Swim coaches and swim instructors are not a substitute for lifeguards unless they are a certified lifeguard and their primary and only responsibility is to lifeguard.
- Lifeguards change/rotate posture (sit, stand, rove) regularly to maintain vigilance and adjust for variations in bather load, water agitation and surface glare. Follow best practice recommendations for rotations established by your training provider / agency.
- Lifeguards wear appropriate apparel clearly identifying them as a lifeguard.
- Lifeguards are rescue ready, wearing a rescue tube (with strap across their chest) and a whistle and are supplied with personal protection equipment, (minimally a fanny pack with mask and gloves), always attached to them while on duty.

Lifeguarding Recommendations ACTION items identified:

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TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Lifeguard orientation and regular ongoing in-service training to include a heavy emphasis on the prevention of drowning, victim recognition and hands on practical skill building.
- Lifeguard orientation to include practice of the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) specific to each aquatic location.
- Conduct regular documented realistic drills that review the site-specific, full-scenario EAP, including non-aquatic emergency response staff. Follow best practice recommendations established by your training provider / agency.
- Ongoing realistic documented training and drills from start to finish performed on living subjects, not just mannequins, so lifeguards get a feel for conditions in the event of a real emergency. Opening the airway, for example, on a person is much different than on a CPR mannequin.
- Involve your local emergency services, EMS, police and fire department in full annual scenario-based drills to ensure proper coordination in emergencies. (*i.e., Medical, Fire, Active Threat, Weather, etc.)*
- Perform documented tests of phones, radios, and hardwired or wireless emergency pool alarm systems at the beginning of each day.

- Plan for thunderstorms and ensure a lightning warning system is in place. Review and ensure strict compliance with your Lightning Pool-Closure Policy for both indoor and outdoor pools.
- Facilities with water park features (e.g., water slides, splash pads, water playgrounds, etc.) should be staffed by certified water park lifeguards.

Lifeguarding Recommendations ACTION items identified:

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MANAGEMENT SUPPORT PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A pre-hire lifeguard test to include victim recognition, and water skills.
- Provide regular documented lifeguard safety equipment checks.
- Observe lifeguard behavior by conducting and documenting hourly quick checks.
- Implement regular lifeguard rotations, for multiple guards, and ensure lifeguards are provided with guard-duty breaks. Follow best practice recommendations for rotations and breaks established by your training provider / agency.
- Adhere to appropriate lifeguard-to-swimmer ratios for each zone and activity. Ensure at least one lifeguard for each body of water. Best practice would be a minimum of two lifeguards and certain factors – such as glare, swimming abilities, lifeguard experience and pool/aquatic configurations – will likely require additional lifeguards and supervision. Ensure alignment with state and local pool code.
- Assign dedicated lifeguards to high-risk areas, such as diving areas and slide splash zones.
- Provide sun and weather protection along with plenty of water for lifeguards, including but not limited to polarized sunglasses, skin protection, hats, and umbrellas.
- Conduct regular in-service visual awareness training drills, silhouette mannequin drills, bottom and surface scanning drills, and scenario-based EAP drills. Follow best practice recommendations established by your training provider / agency.
- Equip pools with elevated guard stands (seat height of five-foot minimum) and emergency communication alarm systems.
- Ensure ongoing skills testing and drills happen during operating hours (not just in-service training hours) and are as realistic as possible. Skills testing and drills should include victim extrication and advanced on-deck care and not just scanning for drop drills or a silhouette on the bottom of the pool.

Management Support Practices ACTION items identified:

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUMMER CAMPS:

- It is important to communicate your minimum safety criteria to camps or third-party organizations. Review and discuss criteria during a tour of the facility with the third-party management in advance, to include restroom and locker room supervision safety policies. Advanced planning is key.
- Provide a safety orientation to summer camp staff in advance of the visit to include a review of the Pool Rules, Swim Testing Procedure, Water Watcher expectations, Emergency Action Plans (including but limited to Medical, Fire, Active Threat, Weather, etc.) and Restroom & Locker Room expectations.
- It is critical that youth remain under the supervision of camp staff in addition to being monitored by facility lifeguards. It is important that counselors understand that water activities are not break time just because lifeguards are present. Rather, water activity time is when everyone needs to be at their most vigilant. By working together with lifeguards, counselors can add extra layers of protection, helping ensure that all activities are safe and appropriate, and that guards can focus their attention on guarding the pool.
- Consider instituting a minimum camp staff (Water Watcher) to camper (swimmer) ratio.
- Buddies and buddy checks are an important layer of protection and best practice for all youth swimming activities.
- Encourage / require camps to provide formal water safety training to camp staff. Consider recommending Water Safety for Camps & Caregivers training from a national training agency for non-lifeguard and camp staff who will be supervising youth in or around any source of water or aquatic activity.

Management Support Practices ACTION items identified:

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ONGOING (YEAR-ROUND) CONSIDERATIONS:

- Consider scheduling an annual independent third-party assessment of aquatic facility operations. Independent assessments provide an unbiased, objective review of aquatic safety operations and identify areas for improvement, especially for lifeguard operations.
- Ensure a comprehensive Aquatic Safety Plan is in place, for each aquatic location.
- Ensure a documented plan is in place for management of certifications.
- Conduct an electrical inspection every three to five years to identify potential shock hazards.
- Ensure compliance with the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act (VGBA) by ensuring compliant pool drain covers and secondary anti-entrapment systems are installed to prevent serious injury or death of pool and spa users. This precaution is not only important for safety; it is required by federal law.

Ongoing Considerations ACTION items identified:

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