Essential Aquatic Safety Guidelines

The Essential Safety Guidelines presented in the following table are the most vital aspects of the YMCA of the USA Aquatic Guidelines, which you will find in the *YMCA Aquatic Management: A Guide to Effective Leadership* manual. These Essential Safety Guidelines are the starter kit of guidelines; they will help you implement the policies and practices necessary to ensure critical safety in all of your aquatic operations.

YMCA of the USA develops guidelines as good practices for operating safe, effective programs. YMCAs should give serious consideration to all guidelines; however, do not confuse guidelines with standards, which are rules or policies governing any particular program that can only be set by the local association.

YMCA of the USA recommends that YMCAs strive to meet all Y-USA guidelines. To begin, ensure that your YMCA meets the forty highlighted Essential Safety Guidelines in the table. These are the most critical to ensuring safe aquatic operations every day in your YMCA.

### How to use the Essential Safety Guidelines

Following is a recommended five-step approach, which utilizes an outside validation team:

1. The association CEO or branch executive explains the assessment process to staff and volunteers and stresses the importance of honest evaluation of the level of aquatic safety. Understanding your current situation is the first step in raising and improving the level of safety.

2. A validation team is recruited. This team may include program participants, experts in aquatics, directors of other aquatics facilities, YMCA board members, or staff from other YMCAs.

3. An orientation is conducted for the validation team to review the association’s aquatics program standards.

4. The validation team conducts a review of the aquatics program.

5. The validation team reports its findings to the YMCA Board of Directors through the appropriate channels and process.

Using a validation team provides good community publicity for your YMCA. It familiarizes key people with YMCA aquatics programs and impresses upon them your concern for quality.
The team should rate each guideline on a scale between one and five, with one being noncompliance and five being complete compliance.

After the assessment is completed, staff and volunteers should determine what corrective action, if any, is needed to bring programs in line with your association’s standards. A realistic timetable should be established for implementation, and a monitoring system that focuses on achievement should be put in place. Maintaining high quality in programs is an ongoing job; assessment needs to be done regularly to maintain the standards.

The Essential Safety Guidelines will assist you in operating safe aquatic facilities. They cover the following topics:

- Philosophy and goals
- Administration
- Leadership staff/volunteer
- Lifeguards
- Program content
- Facilities and equipment
- Health and safety
- Swim team
- Diving
- Scuba
- Evaluation
- Specialty areas:
  - Child care and camp aquatics
  - Non-YMCA facilities
  - Waterfront safety

Note: The reference number column (REF. #) in the following table gives you the corresponding section of the YMCA of the USA Aquatic Guidelines, found on www.ymcaexchange.org and in the YMCA Aquatic Management manual, available from the YMCA Program Store at 800-872-9622.
# PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS

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1. The YMCA of the USA’s purpose, goals, and mission statements are posted in a prominent location in the facilities and demonstrated in all programs, brochures, and other materials.  

2. A written aquatic policy addresses the following topics:  
   - Purpose and objectives  
   - Staffing (professional, full- and part-time, and volunteer)  
   - Planning and program priorities  
   - Community relationships  
   - Promotional planning  
   - Policy development (a list of operational policies)  
   - Facilities and equipment  
   - Financial management  
   - Operational evaluation  
   - Health and safety  
   (The aquatic policy may be a section of a larger policy on health and fitness.)

# ADMINISTRATION

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3. An organizational chart shows the person to whom each employee reports, and job descriptions clarify where staff responsibilities fall.  

4. All administrative policies, procedures, and practices are in accordance with state and local regulations (where applicable), including the following:  
   - Licensing requirements  
   - Fire and building codes  
   - Health department regulations  
   - Zoning laws  
   - Operating permits  
   - Transportation regulations (if applicable)  
   - Electrical inspection codes  
   - Bacteriological reporting  
   - Other regulations  
   Current copies of state laws and regulations related to swimming pools are available on file to all aquatics staff.

5. Copies of pertinent or applicable staff certifications are kept on file. These may include current certifications in first aid, CPR, AED, and oxygen administration or as a lifeguard, instructor, or pool operator, as well as other additional requirements such as a pesticide applicator’s license.

6. A written risk-management plan specific to the YMCA, particularly for your aquatics facilities and programs, is established and includes the following aspects:  
   - Identifying and analyzing hazards, natural or manmade  
   - Selecting the best technique for dealing with loss exposure  
   - Maintaining continuous evaluation and follow-up
7. A comprehensive and practical record-keeping system is established, and all information is reviewed annually. This system includes, where applicable, the following information:
   - Attendance
   - Payment of fees
   - Skill records
   - Participant evaluation
   - Health screening forms/emergency information
   - Informed consent forms
   - Pool maintenance records
   - Staff training information
   - Authorization for release of a child to an adult other than a parent
   - Accident reports/incident reports (see items F11 and F12)
   - Equipment and supplies

8. A written enrollment and admission program policy is established and copies are given to program participants or their parents. It includes, where applicable, the following items:
   - Fee structure and payment policy
   - Program information packet including, where applicable, the following:
     - Goals
     - Description of program activities and operation
     - The hours of operation
     - Participant-to-staff ratio
     - Staff qualifications
     - Benefits to participants and their families
     - Parental involvement
     - Other YMCA programs and services
   - The attendance and illness policy
   - Policy regarding refunds, canceled classes, credits, and make-ups
   - Policy regarding parental observation of classes or programs
   - An enrollment form that includes the following information on the participant:
     - Full name
     - Address
     - Phone number
     - Emergency phone number
     - Participant's or parent signature
     - Health screening form
   - A non-discrimination clause/policy
   - Transportation release (if applicable)
   - An authorization for release of a child to an adult other than a parent
   - Parent options for involvement and volunteer opportunities
   - A plan for communicating to participants their progress
   - A policy statement on enrollment of participants with special needs, disabilities, chronic illnesses, medically fragile conditions, and so on
   - A policy statement on behavior management, including your YMCA’s approach to discipline, grounds for enrollment termination, and steps that need to be taken for termination
   - A financial aid statement
   - Members and participants required to show proper identification when entering facility/programs
9. A written agreement is obtained for the rental of any YMCA facilities and equipment, including vehicles, by non-YMCA groups and for YMCA use of non-YMCA facilities and equipment. The agreement shall include, but not be limited to, the following:
   - The responsibilities of each party
   - Fees for use
   - A “hold harmless” agreement
   - A certificate of insurance showing that the YMCA is named as an “additional insured” under the general, auto and umbrella policies
   - Safety standards, pool rules, and safety equipment
   - Help in drafting such an agreement is available from the YMCA of the USA General Counsel office.

10. The following are used in the selection and hiring of staff and in the recruitment of volunteers:
   - Applications
   - Personal interviews
   - References (personal/business)
   - Previous work history
   - Law enforcement record checks (when appropriate)
   - Performance observation (and skill check)
   - A trial performance period (probationary period)

11. The YMCA professional director, who supervises the program, is on the official roster of employed staff and has achieved the following:
   - Twenty-one years of age
   - A Bachelor’s degree in a related field or commensurate experience
   - YMCA Aquatics Management certification
   - Current CPR, first aid, AED, and oxygen administration certification
   - YMCA POOL certification

12. All aquatics staff and volunteers conducting programs and classes meet the following criteria:
   - They are certified as YMCA Specialist Aquatic Instructors (including YMCA Scuba and Competitive Swim programs) for the programs they are teaching or will be within six months of employment (for seasonal programs, within 30 days) Non-certified staff are under the direct supervision of a person certified in that particular program until their certification is received.
   - They are at least 16 years of age or have special approval of the director.
   - They hold current CPR (obstructed airway, adult, infant, and youth) and first aid, AED and oxygen administration certifications, and have taken blood borne pathogen training. Certifications are on file and available for inspection.
   - They have the necessary education or training in compliance with national guidelines or guidelines of the specific program and have had opportunity for continued education at least annually.

13. One or more certified YMCA Specialist Aquatic Trainers are on staff to train YMCA instructors according to national YMCA aquatic guidelines.

14. Staff will intern or practice teach a minimum of four hours with an experienced staff member before they lead their own classes.
15. All staff and volunteers have signed statements that they have read and understood and have agreed to all matters relating to their job functions, which include the following:

- A position description, including environmental factors or specific abilities needed to perform the job
- Hours of work
- Responsibilities for enforcement of association rules and regulations
- Grievance/dismissal policy
- Performance appraisal
- Salary review**
- Vacations**
- Tardiness/absences
- Training opportunities
- Employee benefits
- Employee safety procedures
- Maintenance of certifications
- Conflict of interest policy
- Code of conduct
- Attendance at orientation meeting and receipt of orientation materials (see item C11)

These agreements are kept on file.

**For employees only, when applicable.

16. The following written materials are provided for new staff and volunteers in your YMCA’s aquatics program operations manual. The manual should include at least the following:

- All policies, standards, and operating procedures
- Job description(s)
- Statement of YMCA and program purpose, goals, and philosophy
- Personnel policy, including plans for ongoing supervision, goal setting, performance review, training, and the salary administration plan
- Specific policies and procedures related to individual programs, such as health and safety, emergency procedures, sun safety, transportation, OSHA rules regarding blood borne pathogens, and child abuse prevention
- Program description and fee structure
- YMCA organizational chart with names
- Lifeguard/staff conduct guidelines
- Duty stations
- Instructional program protocols
- Substitution procedures
- Accident reports/incident reports (see items F11 and F12)
- Bathing code
- Pool/diving rules
- Procedures for enforcement of association rules and regulations

Proof of distribution of these materials and orientation is on file.

17. The director of aquatics has a written training plan and has participated in relevant training or continuous education within the past year (for example, Y-USA aquatics training, university courses, technical seminars, and so on).

18. Staff and volunteers wear neat, professional-looking clothing that is suitable for the activity and that identifies them as YMCA personnel.

19. All staff and volunteers receive appropriate recognition for their service.
20. The aquatics director provides staff and volunteer supervision, staff meetings, in-service training, and opportunities for staff to express themselves on aquatics matters through the following:
   - Regularly scheduled staff meetings and in-service training
   - Written job descriptions and performance standards
   - Planned observation of staff and volunteers
   - Conferences, including written appraisals
   - Opportunities for feedback and evaluation
   - Orientation for all new staff and volunteers
   - Training related to personal safety issues (sun safety, chemical hazard awareness, OSHA standards on blood-borne pathogens)
   - Training on and regular practices of safety, emergency procedures, emergency communication system and signals, rescue equipment, and rescues
   - Activities that help staff and others recover from dealing with an emergency
   - Regular tests of aquatic skill proficiency and simulated response using rescue and emergency procedures. These tests are documented.
   - Training opportunities both inside and outside the YMCA.
   - In-service training, staff meetings, and emergency response training are documented and maintained for all staff. The content, length of the meetings/trainings, and attendance are included in the documentation.

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**Lifeguards**

21. Lifeguards and aquatic specialist instructors are strongly encouraged to maintain a high level of swimming fitness.

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22. Aquatic Quick Check
   - Lifeguard is alert, actively scanning, vigilant of the zone(s), and is performing no other duties.
   - Lifeguard is holding a rescue tube with the strap around his or her chest/shoulders at all times when on duty.
   - Lifeguard is sitting in an elevated chair with professional posture or patrolling while on duty.
   - Lifeguard is identifiable, wearing a staff shirt, suit, whistle, name tag, rescue tube, and rescue pack (or has gloves and mask in tube)
   - Lifeguard is turning from side to side while scanning rather than scanning with only eyes moving.
   - Each pool is guarded at all times pool(s) are in operation. One guard cannot guard two pools.

23. Lifeguard will have a second guard or secondary responder (a staff member who has been trained in YASA (YMCA Aquatic Safety Assistant) or emergency procedures and has current CPR first aid, AED, and oxygen administration certification) is available in the building in case of emergency.

24. There shall be one person designated as the head lifeguard. The head lifeguard is responsible for ensuring safe conduct of classes and swim tests and that all aquatic safety and emergency procedures are being followed. The head lifeguard designates someone to perform these duties in his or her absence. There must be a supervisor 21 years or older in the area and at least one aquatic staff member in the pool area 18 years or older at all times.
25. All lifeguards and aquatic specialist instructors are given a thorough interview and both a written and practical water skills examination (including lifeguarding, swimming, and water safety skills) prior to employment. Results of the examination and copies of current certifications are kept on file as part of the employee’s personnel file. An example of pre-hire water skills evaluation for a lifeguard could be a 200-yard continuous swim, surface dive, and recovery of a 10-pound brick from the deep end of the pool; one minute of treading water with a brick; and a victim rescue, exit, and breathing assessment based on a given scenario.

26. Lifeguards are evaluated on their ability to perform and maintain all of the required skills and skill tests of their currently held lifeguarding certification. These skills are verified and documented.

   **Lifeguard in-service training**

   Lifeguards participate in a weekly skills review session that can be conducted 15–20 minutes before their shifts begin. Also schedule 2–4 hours of training/refresher work monthly.

   Follow a written in-service training plan and document training for aquatic and non-aquatic staff. Training shall include: preventing incidents; vigilant guards; scanning/victim recognition; rescue and response; and emergency action plans, including CPR, first aid, AED, and oxygen administration.

27. Indoors, lifeguards are not scheduled for continuous duty periods of longer than two hours without at least a 15-minute break. Outdoors, in high temperatures and humidity, the maximum duty period is no more than one hour without a break.

28. Each YMCA pool is guarded whenever the swimming pool is open for activities, including skill instruction and scuba classes and swim team activities. The lifeguard has no other duties to perform while guarding. He or she conducts a complete inspection of the pool area and pool bottom immediately after each class or recreational swim period. Often, due to many factors, one certified YMCA lifeguard might not be enough. The decision as to the number of lifeguards on duty should be based on these types of factors:

   - Activity or activities in the pool area (on deck and in the water)
   - The size and shape of the pool
   - Equipment in the pool area (slides, inflatables, and so on)
   - The bather load
   - The skill level of the swimmers
   - Changes in glare from sunlight
   - High-use areas
   - Ability to handle emergencies in a proper and effective manner
   - Meeting or exceeding compliance with applicable state and local codes
   - Size of zone so each lifeguard can adequately scan his or her assigned zone in 10 seconds and is able to reach any victim in that zone within 10 seconds.

   Lifeguards on duty are positioned so that they have a full view of the assigned area, above and below the surface of the water. It should be impossible for anyone to enter the pool area without being observed by a lifeguard. Lifeguards should strive to cover their assigned scan zone every 10 seconds and respond to distress situations within 10 seconds.
## PROGRAM CONTENT

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<td>29.</td>
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<td>In all program areas where YMCA of the USA aquatics programs exist, YMCA materials and standards are used as a minimum (including YMCA Scuba and competitive swimming programs). <em>If certifications exist in these program areas, the YMCA certification shall be used.</em> Other agency programs are taught only in program areas not covered by YMCA of the USA.</td>
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<td>30.</td>
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<td>In line with the YMCA mission, the ultimate goal of aquatics programs is to develop the whole person spiritually, mentally, and physically. In order to achieve this goal, the instructor should have a basic understanding of and respect for the individuality and uniqueness of each student. The teaching methods that are recommended throughout the programs are student-centered. They are designed to help develop each participant’s human potential, to encourage his or her awareness of safety in all aspects of the program, and to perfect skills to the best of his or her ability. The program designs include specific methods to achieve YMCA program goals.</td>
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| 31. | | The instructor/participant ratios are based upon the age of participants, the program offered, the size of the facility, and the other programs offered in the pool at the same time. In general terms, recommended class ratios are as follows:  
- Parent/Child classes ... 1:10–12 pairs  
- Preschool classes ... 1:6  
- Youth classes  
- Polliwogs and Guppies ... 1:8  
- Minnows and up ... 1:10  
- Adult instructional classes ... 1:8–12 (depending on the type of class and the skill level of the participants)  
- Water fitness ... 1:25  
- Lifeguard classes ... 1:20  
- Arthritis exercise classes ... 1:20 |
| 32. | | Instructional flotation devices are used as teaching aids in all YMCA Swim Lessons instruction. |
| 33. | | A parent orientation is included as part of the first class for parents of children participating in preschool and youth YMCA Swim Lessons programs. |
| 34. | | At least one YMCA Splash campaign is conducted each year for the community. |
| 35. | | Aquatic programs for children under the age of 3 should follow the Medical Advisory Committee statement “Aquatic Program Guidelines for Children Under the Age of Three.” |

## FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

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<td>36.</td>
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<td>A copy of your state and local bathing codes and permits are kept on file, reviewed by staff, and, if required, posted for the public to see.</td>
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<td>37.</td>
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<td>All sites and facilities are appropriate for the class activity, including equipment and supplies of sufficient quality, quantity, and variety, and are developmentally appropriate for the participants’ ages, their abilities and disabilities, and the size of the group.</td>
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<td>38.</td>
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<td>All aquatics facilities and equipment are inspected regularly (daily, weekly, monthly, or annually, depending on the area of the facility inspected) for safety by the director of the program (or someone he or she assigns) and judged suitable for use. Records of inspections are kept on file for at least five years.</td>
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<td>39.</td>
<td>E4</td>
<td>A written schedule of preventative maintenance for all facilities and equipment exists, and documentation indicates when the work has been performed, who performed it, and that it was approved.</td>
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<td>40.</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>All floors and deck surfaces and equipment are cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis and are free of unsafe or hazardous conditions. Free standing water is removed when ever possible to minimize slips and falls. Proof of maintenance is on file.</td>
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<td>41.</td>
<td>E6</td>
<td>A YMCA POOL-certified operator is on staff to monitor and maintain the disinfection, filtration, and mechanical operation of each aquatic facility to ensure that state and local health department standards are being met. Records are on file as proof of this function, and copies are sent to the state health department as required.</td>
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<td>42.</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>Measurements of water and air temperature, chemical levels, humidity, pool clarity, and bather load are taken every hour during pool operation. Each pool is tested at both the shallow and deep ends of the pool. This includes pools, spas and wading pools at the facility. The Langelier saturation index water balance is measured weekly and appropriate necessary chemicals added to achieve acceptable water balance. These measurements are recorded in a pool log, which is kept on file for at least five years (or longer if the documentation is relevant to pending litigation). Someone other than the lifeguard on duty should take water readings.</td>
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<td>43.</td>
<td>E8 and</td>
<td>The pool area has an emergency lighting system, which is tested monthly. The emergency lighting system, the regular pool lighting, and the mechanical, ventilating, and plumbing systems are maintained in good working condition at all times and are inspected periodically. Roof and ceiling are inspected by a licensed structural engineer at least once every 5 years. A schedule of inspections and written reports are on file.</td>
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<td>44.</td>
<td>E9</td>
<td>and Pool filters are routinely maintained and backwashed in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions. A record of maintenance is on file.</td>
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<td>45.</td>
<td>E10</td>
<td>Rules, regulations, warning signs, and procedures for use of the swimming pool, locker rooms, and diving areas are permanently mounted in the pool and locker room areas (for example, pool rules are posted near the pool entrance and diving rules near the diving board). Rules are clearly written in positive language and are reviewed with members and participants.</td>
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<td>46.</td>
<td>E13</td>
<td>Material Safety Data Sheets from OSHA are posted in the room or readily available where chemicals are used. Chemicals are clearly identified and stored properly, and a warning sign is posted on the outside of the door.</td>
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<td>47.</td>
<td>E14</td>
<td>For indoor pools, at the water’s surface there is a minimum illumination of 30-foot candles when underwater lighting is on. Without underwater lighting, a minimum illumination of 50-foot candles is recommended. For outdoor pools, underwater lighting provides 60-foot candles of illumination measured at the surface.</td>
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<td>48.</td>
<td>E15</td>
<td>A written security plan is developed and implemented. The plan should include methods to keep any unauthorized persons from entering the swimming area when not officially open. This plan addresses both daily and seasonal security concerns.</td>
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<td>49.</td>
<td>E16</td>
<td>For seasonal pools, a sign is posted when the pool has been closed for the season stating that the pool is closed and no lifeguards are on duty.</td>
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YMCA of the USA

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50. A severe weather policy is developed that considers issues such as early identification of storms through weather monitoring, the evacuation of patrons to appropriate sheltered areas, and a communication system to convey instructions. As an example, the National Weather Service recommends, if lightning occurs in the area, the indoor or outdoor pool is cleared when either of the following occurs: (1) cloud-to-ground lightning is observed, and less than 30 seconds pass from seeing a flash and hearing thunder from that flash; (2) in-cloud lightning is occurring overhead. The pool can be considered safe to reoccupy 30 minutes after the last lightning is seen or thunder is heard.*

51. Local EMS providers are invited to your facility at least annually to discuss coordination and individual responsibilities in the event of an aquatic emergency. If local EMS providers require any specific or unusual procedures or actions of your facility/staff, ask that they document their request in writing.

52. All outdoor pools have perimeter fencing at least six feet high, and eight feet is recommended. Fencing is in good condition and is inspected regularly for protrusions, sharp edges, openings, etc.

53. Grates covering floor drains and the pool bottom are tightly secured and flush, requiring tools to remove them. They are in good condition and have no enlarged opening greater than one half inch.

54. All electrical outlets in wet areas have ground fault circuit interrupters.

55. There is an electrical inspection every 3 to 5 years to certify the pool area is bonded and grounded.

56. There is at least one elevated lifeguard chair for every 2000 feet of water surface area. The chair should be 5 to 6 feet high from the deck at the seat. All lifeguards should be trained to get properly up and down from the chair safely.

57. Established accident and emergency procedures are written and posted, and all staff and volunteers are trained to handle emergency situations. The procedures cover the following situations:
   - All possible injury emergencies
   - Heart attack
   - Death
   - Facility evacuation
   - Power failure
   - Natural disasters and severe weather
   - Chemical leak
   - Loss of communication capability (downed phone lines, etc.)
   - OSHA standards on blood-borne pathogens exposure control plan
   - Drowning or near drowning
   - Back injuries
   - Steps for reducing the emotional trauma to staff and others encountering such situations

* National weather service recommendation. (US Dept. of Commerce; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; National Weather Service Forecast Office, 1200 Westheimer Dr., Rm. 101, Norman OK 73069, 12/16/99) Letter from James Purpura, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, National Weather Service and Ron Holle, Lightning Researcher, National Severe Storms Laboratory. Letter to Cleveland County YMCA, Norman OK.
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<td>Documented regular training sessions are held for all staff and volunteers to review all the safety rules and practice the emergency procedures. Procedures are rehearsed at least every two weeks during peak season and at least once a month at all other times. F2</td>
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<td>59.</td>
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<td>An accessible telephone or emergency alarm system is in the immediate pool area, with posted emergency procedures and numbers. Emergency phone numbers include as a minimum numbers for the police, fire department, poison control, and key staff contacts. F3</td>
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<td>60.</td>
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<td>A participant accident and emergency evacuation plan with clear, precise directions is posted conspicuously near each activity area and in each locker room. F4</td>
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| 61.    |        | The following safety equipment is available and within easy access of lifeguard stations at all times:  
- Rescue tube/rescue buoy, resuscitation mask, and latex gloves for each lifeguard  
- Reaching poles and shepherd's crook  
- Soft ring buoys 15 to 18 inches in diameter, attached securely to a length of line sufficient to reach across the width of the pool  
- Backboard equipped with straps, a head immobilizer, and cervical collars  
- First aid kit completely stocked to treat all common pool emergencies  
- Emergency supplemental oxygen (recommended)  
- AED (recommended)  
This equipment is in good repair and inspected regularly. Check your local ordinances to determine the number of each piece of equipment that is needed. F5 |
| 62.    |        | First aid kits, blood-borne pathogen spill kits, bag-valve mask, mechanical suction device, and other first-aid supplies are located in the aquatic facility, and signs are posted to indicate their location. F6 |
| 63.    |        | First aid materials and equipment are inventoried monthly, and supplies are replaced and updated on a regular basis. A record of inspections is kept on file. F7 |
| 64.    |        | If AEDs and supplemental oxygen are used, all federal, state, and manufacturer requirements are followed. F8 |
| 65.    |        | A sign is posted indicating the designated emergency entrance. F9 |
| 66.    |        | Incident and accident reports are filed immediately after each incident or accident and processed according to standard emergency procedures for your association. Appropriate authorities are informed. Reports are kept on file. (A sample accident report form appears in chapter 9 of *YMCA Aquatic Management: A Guide to Effective Leadership.*) F11 |
| 67.    |        | Incident and accident report forms are available at courtesy and service counters, from off-site instructors, and from staff for reporting injuries, accidents, and other incidents.  
A procedure is established for promptly informing parents of injuries and explaining the exact circumstances. Reports are forwarded to the supervisor and executive director for review and follow-up. Reports are kept on file. F12 |
| 68.    |        | Accident and emergency procedures are established for each off-site location in cooperation with the lessee or contracting organization. Procedures are written and included in your YMCA's aquatics program operations manual. F13 |
69. Procedures for handling suspected child abuse and neglect incidents include documenting and reporting them to child protection services and other procedures as required by your state and local codes. All staff, including volunteers, are trained in these procedures. (See the YMCA of the USA Medical Advisory Committee statement "Child Abuse Identification and Prevention: Recommended Guidelines for YMCAs" on www.ymcaexchange.org.)

70. Warning signs are posted to indicate there is no diving in shallow water. (For example: Danger! Shallow water. Diving prohibited. Paralysis or death may occur.) A universal warning sign can be used for easier understanding by sight impaired individuals or by multilingual participants.

71. During recreational swims, a procedure is used to determine the swimming ability of those claiming to be swimmers and, if necessary, to assign them to the nonswimmer area. Persons unable to swim one length of the pool (minimum 75 feet) are classified as nonswimmers. Approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) are allowed for use during recreational swims for those individuals who need them, in addition to required adult supervision. Instructional flotation devices (IFDs) are not recommended for use by nonswimmers during recreational swims.

72. Children seven years of age or younger are not allowed into an aquatic facility without supervision due to their inability to fully appreciate the dangers of water and other hazards. Older age minimum limits are acceptable based on association needs and policy. No one younger than sixteen years of age is allowed to supervise children.

73. A warning sign or pool rules sign is appropriately posted that indicates that "Parents or guardians are responsible for supervising their children. Lifeguards are on duty to enforce rules and to respond in case of emergency." In addition, YMCA of the USA recommends that recreational swim pool rules state that young children or nonswimmers should remain within arm's length of a responsible adult at all times.

74. A lifeline is in place between the deep and shallow water during recreational swims stretched tight enough to support an adult with his or her head above water.

75. When flotation devices are used as teaching aids, all aquatics staff are trained in the use of these devices and other equipment used for swimming instruction.

76. Pool water is maintained at strict standards of clarity at all times to permit observation of the bottom of the pool. Floating objects such as kickboards or rubber balls used in instruction or recreational periods are to be removed from the water and stored appropriately immediately after use.

77. Water depths are clearly marked on the pool deck and vertical wall at or above the water surface in feet/inches and meters. Markers should be of contrasting color with the deck and wall background and a minimum of four inches high.

78. When the pool is drained for repair or cleaning, signs to that effect are posted on the outside of all doors leading to the pool area, and all doors are kept locked (unless otherwise required by local fire codes).
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| 79. | F31 | For water slides or drop slides, the following precautions are taken:  
- Lifeguard is stationed near the discharge of the slide and is only responsible for that area of the pool.  
- A trained staff member is stationed at the top of the slide to control discharge of sliders.  
- A sign is posted on the entrance to slides that states that all sliders should not proceed down the slide until instructed to do so by staff.  
- Slides are inspected daily for loose railings, sharp edges in the flume, loose guards, etc. |
| 80. | F32 | In zero-depth pools, a four-inch- to six-inch-wide line is painted or a floating buoy line is installed across the pool at the two-and-a-half- to three-foot-depth mark. This visual marker will help parents and lifeguards keep young children in shallow water. |
| 81. | F33 | During recreational swims, a planned rest period (5-10 minutes) occurs each hour, during which the pool is cleared. |
| 82. | F34 | Lifeguards for outdoor pools are required to wear sunglasses (polarized and block 99 to 100% of UV-A and UV-B rays), a hat or visor, and sunscreen (minimum 15 SPF) to protect against the sun’s rays. Annual training is provided on sun protection safety and your association’s policy regarding the use of sun-protective devices. |
| 83. | F37 | A fecal contamination policy is established and procedure in place to document incident and action steps. |
| **SWIM TEAM** | | |
| 84. | D10 | A current professional staff member who works with competitive swim teams is directly responsible for interaction with the Parents’ Committee. The Parents’ Committee is a subcommittee of the YMCA board/committee structure. All swim team money is deposited in YMCA accounts. |
| 85. | D11 | YMCA certified officials are used for competitive swim events. |
| 86. | E11 | Starting blocks are placed only in the deep end of the pool in no less than five feet of water. They are used only under the direct supervision of a trained competition swimming coach or certified YMCA Swim Lessons instructor. Safety warnings are posted regarding starting block use. Starting blocks must be removed or capped off to avoid unintended use; if they are in the shallow end, they need to be removed. |
| **DIVING** | | |
| 87. | E12 | All diving boards have two guardrails that extend one foot over the pool. Rails of three-meter boards are enclosed to prevent falling. Ladders or steps are not vertical, but slant at an angle. Diving board fulcrums are locked in a forward position when used for recreational diving. See chapter 10 of *YMCA Aquatic Management: A Guide to Effective Leadership* for information on appropriate minimum water depths for diving. |
| 88. | F17 | Diving board use is supervised, and rules are established and prominently posted for the type of diving to occur. For competitive programs, current state and local codes and national governing bodies’ regulations for the sport are followed. For recreational programs, see the YMCA of the USA Medical Advisory Committee statement “Diving Board Guidelines for YMCAs” available on [www.ymcaexchange.org](http://www.ymcaexchange.org). |
### SCUBA

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Instructors teaching scuba for a YMCA are required to have a minimum of $1 million professional liability insurance. Additionally, scuba instructors are certified as SLAM (Scuba Lifesaving and Accident Management) instructors.

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YMCAs offering scuba lessons shall use and certify the YMCA Scuba program taught by certified and insured YMCA Scuba instructors. Instructor crossover programs are available for YMCAs using instructors certified by agencies other than YMCA. For information and instructor referrals, contact the national YMCA Scuba office.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

#### NON-YMCA FACILITIES/NON-YMCA GROUPS

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When programs are managed by the YMCA, swimming takes place only during daylight hours or in appropriately lighted facilities and when one or more certified YMCA lifeguards are on duty. If the YMCA does not manage a program, one or more YMCA staff members are on duty at all times while the group is utilizing the facility.

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During boating activities, every person must wear a United States Coast Guard-approved PFD that is in good condition.

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All outside facilities meet appropriate local YMCA program and safety standards. A person approved by the YMCA should regularly inspect the facility and ensure compliance with standards.

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Participants and staff abide by local YMCA safety and behavior standards during off-site competitive swim meets, water carnivals, or other water activities.

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When outside groups use YMCA facilities (including high school rentals), an appropriate number of YMCA lifeguards are on duty. The program has been reviewed by the YMCA executive and aquatics directors and is consistent with the YMCA’s policies. (See also item B20.)

### EVALUATION

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All programs are evaluated annually by the Health and Physical Education Committee, the Aquatics Committee, and/or through an assessment process.

### ADDITIONAL SPECIALTY AREAS

#### CHILD CARE AND CAMPING AQUATICS ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

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a. A written plan is in place for safety considerations (depth of water, starting blocks, number of children in the water, identification of swimmers who cannot swim, staff placement in and out of the water, etc.) Everyone is aware of the plan and emergency procedures (including lost swimmer drills).

b. A camp/child care supervisor is on duty during aquatic activities, in addition to an on-site aquatic supervisor. This is in addition to the appropriate number of lifeguards and other staff necessary to protect the safety of the children. If a center is licensed, required ratios are maintained.

c. If the plan for swimming does not include instruction, conduct games and activities during at least part of the recreational swimming time. (Note: When children are involved in activities they are safer and learn additional skills.)
d. An aquatic safety orientation and training session is conducted by well-trained and experienced aquatic staff members for all camp/child care staff who will assist in swimming activities. A session is conducted prior to the camp/child care program and sessions continue throughout the season. A lost swimmer policy and drill is established and part of the aquatic plan. The lost swimmer drill is reviewed with all staff and practiced on a regular basis throughout the season. (Refer to *On the Guard II: The YMCA Lifeguard Manual*.)

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e. Responsibilities for day camp/child care staff, swim instructors, lifeguards, and children are defined. Here is an example for recreational activities:

**Camp/child care staff**
- Watch children at all times, whether they are in the water, locker rooms, or elsewhere.
- Pair up buddies (if buddy system is used).
- Provide behavioral guidance and help to enforce pool/waterfront rules.
- Supervise in locker rooms and on deck.
- Ensure children take thorough soap showers before entering the pool.
- Help children keep track of their clothing.
- Follow your YMCA's policy for proper attire on deck.
- Follow all rules and regulations.
- Alert the lifeguard if assistance is needed.
- Keep track of swimmers who leave the pool/waterfront area.
- Conduct head counts.
- Obey lifeguard decisions and instructions.
- Supervise children not participating in programmed aquatic activities.
- Collect lost and found articles; clean up the deck/beach area.
- Inform aquatic staff if any child has disabilities or requires special attention.
- Know emergency procedures and lost swimmer policy.

**Children**
- Take care of their clothing and towel.
- Take a thorough soap shower before entering the pool.
- Follow all pool/waterfront rules and procedures.
- Ask permission to leave the pool/waterfront area.
- Stop talking when the whistle blows. (“When the whistle blows, mouths close.”)
- Stay with their buddy (if buddy system is used).

**Lifeguards**
- Guard the pool/waterfront and enforce the rules.
- If not on guard duty at the time, test children, assign them to a swimming area, and give them identifiable bands (or other forms of identifying their swim level).
- If not on guard duty at the time, orient swimmers to rules and procedures to follow when in the pool/waterfront area.

**Swim instructor**
- Teach classes.
- Be certified in the aquatics specialist area in which they are instructing (for example, YMCA Swim Lessons: Youth and Adult Instructor).
- Maintain complete records and complete end-of-session progress reports.

|     |     |          |
f. The following children-to-staff ratios are maintained when children are in the water (Ratios do not include the lifeguard(s) or supervising child care/camp staff members.):

_Instructional swimming_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
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<tr>
<td>0–3</td>
<td>1:1 in the water unless state child care licensing regulations are stricter. Follow YMCA of the USA Aquatic guidelines for children under the age of three.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>6:1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3–5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>8:1 Polliwog and Guppy levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6 and up)</td>
<td>10:1 Minnow and up</td>
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_Recreational swimming_

Based on the facility's size and water depth, equipment, and participants’ age and ability levels, additional supervision may be required. As a general rule, the ratio should be one lifeguard for every twenty-five campers (age six and over) plus one additional trained day camp staff member who serves as a “safety assistant” on deck to observe swimmers. Children under the age of six should have appropriate supervision in the water based on the instructional class ratios listed above, in addition to lifeguards.

Other camp/child care staff should still be involved with the children playing in the water or be assigned to children who are on the deck or not swimming. [Note: Pool design and water depth may affect the number of staff needed (e.g., if the pool is too deep for children to stand, additional staff may be needed and/or flotation devices may be required for children).] Children under the age of six and those with special needs will require additional supervision.

During recreational swimming, the number of nonswimmers (e.g., preschoolers in the water without flotation devices) should be limited or additional staff assigned to increase supervision. All nonswimmers who cannot stand on the bottom of the pool with their heads above water should wear approved flotation devices.

Those designated as “Safety Assistants” (day camp/child care staff members) should be under the direct supervision of aquatic personnel; oriented to procedures for aquatic safety, the activity, and the site, and be certified in elementary emergency assistance, CPR, and first aid; and stationed to observe, quickly assist participants, and signal lifeguards if necessary.

(Note: We recommend that these individuals be certified as YMCA Aquatics Safety Assistants.)

g. Entry into and exit from the pool/waterfront is planned to ensure staff always know how many children are with them and where those children are at all times. Head counts are done and/or attendance is taken before children enter the water and prior to their leaving the pool/waterfront area. All children are seated in a standard location before and after aquatics activities.
**YMCA of the USA**  
**Essential Aquatic Safety Guidelines**

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<td>h.</td>
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<td>Camp/child care staff are aware of and follow each individual pool’s/waterfront’s operating procedures (if the program utilizes several sites).</td>
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<td>i.</td>
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<td>A head count system is used during the recreational swim. During regular periods, all swimmers are called out of the water and the number of swimmers is counted (e.g., every fifteen minutes, after three loud whistle blasts, the children must sit on the side of the pool or deck with their buddies, and the children are counted). State or local codes on frequency of head counts are followed.</td>
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<td>j.</td>
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<td>If children leave to use the restroom, they check in with staff before reentering the water. Children are supervised in the restrooms or locker rooms by more than one adult as a child abuse prevention practice.</td>
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<td>k.</td>
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<td>Children are required to pass a swim test before being allowed in the deep end of the pool or water. The test should include the ability to swim the length (twenty to twenty-five yards) of the pool/waterfront comfortably without use of flotation devices. The results of testing are documented. Swimmers who are allowed in the deep end are identified by wristbands, caps, etc. The results of testing are documented (e.g., which children can swim, where they can go in the water). All children who do not pass the test are classified as nonswimmers.</td>
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**98. NON-YMCA OWNED FACILITIES AND WATER PARKS**

| a.     |        | Day camp and childcare programs use only public/private waterfronts that have a qualified lifeguard or lifeguards on duty. If the programs use waterfronts without lifeguards on duty, the YMCA provides its own lifeguard(s), who must hold proper certification and receive additional site-specific training for that aquatic environment. |
| b.     |        | Prior to the trip, the day camp/child care director visits with the park staff to walk through the facility to review parking areas, entrances and exits, bathrooms, vending areas, and first aid stations, and to review the proper use of slides and other equipment, emergency procedures, missing child procedures (including intercom announcements regarding lost children), lifeguard/swimmer ratios, etc. Staff write a plan based on this meeting. |
| c.     |        | When the group arrives, it checks in with the facility manager or head lifeguard. |
| d.     |        | Any child with disabilities or who requires special attention is brought to the attention of the aquatic staff of the aquatic facility. |
| e.     |        | Day camp/child care staff do a head count or take attendance regularly, and they give children a rest period (5–10 minutes) every hour. |
| f.     |        | Children have identification bands or other means of identifying them as members of the YMCA group. Children stay with a buddy from the time they leave the YMCA until they return. Staff wear the same identifying YMCA attire (T-shirts, visors, etc.) so they can be easily identified as YMCA staff. |
99. WATERFRONT SAFETY

In these guidelines, the term waterfront will refer to any place where open water meets land. This includes both surf and inland aquatic environments, such as rivers, ponds, lakes (natural or artificial), quarries, reservoirs, and ocean beaches.

a. Waterfront program and facility operations must conform to all local, state, and federal health and safety codes and ordinances. YMCA of the USA aquatic guidelines (where applicable) and applicable American Camping Association standards should still apply. An association policy is developed based on these. K1

b. A written policy explaining aquatic operating and emergency procedures is available and is reviewed with all camp and aquatic leadership staff regularly throughout the season. (See On the Guard II: The YMCA Lifeguard Manual.) K2

c. All waterfront program and facility operations have the following equipment readily available in an appropriate quantity based on the size of the facility and attendance:

- Emergency equipment
- Telephone with emergency numbers posted nearby
- A first aid kit
- Personal protective equipment (e.g., latex gloves, resuscitation masks, eye shields, resuscitation equipment)
- A backboard with straps, plus a head restraint and cervical collars
- A rescue boat or paddle board
- Rescue tubes/buoys
- A mask, fins, and snorkel
- A rescue boat or motorized rescue craft recommended for larger facilities
- All equipment is inspected daily.

YMCA's in remote and rural locations should seriously consider having the following available:

- Supplemental oxygen (O2)
- An automatic external defibrillator (AED)
- A first aid room with a bed and refrigeration or ice available
- Splints
- Blankets
- A bag valve mask
- A mechanical suction device

Factors to help determine the necessity of this equipment are time and distance away from advanced life support services. A helicopter landing zone location and emergency procedures for helicopter evacuation should be established. Advanced-trained staff (EMT/RN) will be needed on site in these areas. Staff on duty should be trained and certified to use additional medical equipment (O2 or AED), if available.

A telephone or cell phone is readily accessible to the waterfront staff for emergencies. We recommend that staff practice rescue drills and review them with local EMS personnel to maximize efficiency if needed.

Communication equipment is readily available. Examples include flags, a public address system, walkie-talkies, bullhorns, intercoms, cell phones, and telephones. Whistles can be used as a means of communication to swimmers (one blast means listen; two means resume activity; three means get out of the water immediately).

Behavioral rules and warning signs: Rules and warnings are clearly stated on signs and can be understood by swimmers. The signs are adequately secured and in accordance with ANSI sign standards.
c. **Beaches**  
B(eaches are inspected each day to look for unusual hazards and to mitigate hazards (e.g., empty the trashcans to reduce the number of bees). Identify water/bottom conditions such as the following and decide how to deal with them:
- Accuracy of depth markers
- Debris on bottom
- Holes or sandbars
- Currents or tides
- Drains or open storm sewers
- Wave size, direction, and type
- Thermocline conditions and water temperature
- Water/bottom conditions are inspected daily.

**Docks**

Docks are checked for stability, surface slickness, and protruding splinters, nails, or other sharp objects. For diving, springboard diving equipment and the height of the dock and springboards above water (variation of depth due to evaporation and tides/dam water level) are checked.

d. A lifeguard(s) who is currently YMCA certified is on duty at all times the facility is open. Lifeguards are not given duties unrelated to their public safety function of water surveillance. Sufficient breaks are provided (per aquatics guidelines) throughout shifts.

In-service training, including child abuse prevention, and training specific to the facility must be provided. Lifeguards practice the facility's emergency action plan(s) prior to the opening of the facility and periodically during the season. Lifeguards at any aquatics facility that offers swimming regularly practice lost swimmer drills and submerged victim drills (with mask and fins) in the water with zero visibility.

Lifeguards are positioned so all areas of the beach, water, docks, and floats are easily observable. Lifeguard staffing is at a level adequate to ensure that distress of any person in a protected swimming area can be quickly recognized and a rescue immediately initiated. Zone coverage is set by policy and clearly stated to all lifeguards via training procedures, policies, and posted directions. Zones require lifeguards to scan no more than 180 degrees and allow lifeguards to reach the victim in 10 seconds. (This means no more than 180 degrees and no farther than a 10-second swim to the farthest point in their zone.) Specific and continual attention must be given to persons swimming underwater, diving, or surface diving.

A public address system and hand-held megaphones are available to staff to enforce beachfront rules and coordinate an emergency response.

International staff working in USA camps must “crossover” their aquatics and safety certifications to receive a USA course certification. If they do not obtain USA certification, those staff are assigned to other duties.

Lifeguard in-service training includes the following in addition to regular training for non-waterfront areas:
- Lost bather drills
- Boat rescue techniques
- Search and recovery in turbid water
- The use of mask and fins
- Paddleboard rescue techniques
- The use of scuba (if lifeguards are certified in scuba and its use is applicable)
e. Water Environments

*Swimming areas:* These areas are roped off with lines running parallel to shore so swimmers can stay in water of the same depth. The swimmers are informed of the potential hazards and rules of the area. All swimmers are given an orientation prior to their first aquatic experience, including a deep-water test.

The size of the swimming area is limited to a space that can be adequately searched for a known submerged victim in a two-minute time period.

Flotation buoys and warning signs are used to identify water depths or any sudden drop-offs.

If the water is over 13 feet deep, masks, snorkels, and fins are available for lifeguards and additional line is attached to each rescue tube.

The swimming area has limited access. It is fenced and locked appropriately.

*Divining areas:* No-diving signs are posted when the area does not meet minimum diving depths as indicated in YMCA of the USA aquatics guidelines. Rules and warnings are clearly stated and can be understood by swimmers on signs that are adequately secured and in accordance with ANSI sign standards. Incompatible activities such as boating, water skiing, and fishing are prohibited near swimming areas and are constantly monitored.

*Waves:* Lifeguards practice preventive lifeguarding, directing potential victims away from beach hazards or waves caused by boats.

*Currents:* Lifeguards educate swimmers on how to identify currents and how to get out of them. They practice preventive lifeguarding by identifying rip currents and directing swimmers away from them. Clear, understandable warning signs are posted where appropriate.

*Piers:* Signs are posted on piers and lifeguards issue warnings from piers and mobile units to keep swimmers away from danger areas.

*Ocean bottoms:* Lifeguards actively warn swimmers of dangers in the area. They discourage dangerous activities such as skim boarding “aerial dismounts,” shallow diving, horseplay, pier jumping, or diving under docks.

*Flotation devices:* (boogie boards, surfboards, skim boards, air mattresses, etc.): Lifeguards educate swimmers on the hazards of these devices and the problems swimmers will face if they lose their flotation devices. Lifeguards take steps to segregate swimming from surfing populations.

*Backwash:* Lifeguards actively warn beach patrons during times of dangerous backwash.

*Aquatic life:* Lifeguards educate swimmers on the local aquatic life and the hazards that aquatic life presents. Warning signs are posted during appropriate seasons.

Adapted from YMCA Aquatic Management: A Guide to Effective Leadership, copyright 2003 by YMCA of the USA.
REFERENCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION


