

# HANDS-ON-HOW-TO OFAQUATICS STAFFING

## Assessing Aquatics Activities To Identify Supervision Requirements

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*By participating in this session, participants will*

- Have an understanding of how to assess the specific supervision needs of aquatics activities at their camp
  - Have tools to use to facilitate the assessment process
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**Aquatics staffing IS about managing risk:** We hire aquatics staff in order to help control and manage the risks of having aquatics program activities. Staffing in order to help ensure good risk management in aquatics areas is comprised of two key components – control & response. Staff Control. Staff Response.

**CONTROL:** This is the preventative. As in, how much control does the staff have in preventing bad things from happening? The higher control you have over the variables which impact the activity, the lower the risk of injury to participants. By assessing the potential risks of the aquatics activity (looking at possible worse case scenarios) we identify what we need to take control of in order to prevent the risk from occurring (preventing worse case scenarios). After we know what we need to control, we can put the “how” it is to be controlled in place, which includes hiring, training, and supervising staff...

**RESPONSE:** This is being prepared for when you lose control. What do your staff do when that bad thing you tried to prevent from happening (through control) happens? The higher the quality of the response, the lower the risk of injury to participants. By assessing the potential risks of the aquatics activity (looking at possible worse case scenarios) we identify what we need may need to respond to (responding to worse case scenarios). After we know what we may need to respond to, we can put the “how to” in place, which includes hiring, training, and supervising staff...

**Staffing is a key component in aquatic risk management.** While some control can be managed through decisions regarding physical facility location & use, and requirements for participation, it is primarily through staffing where a camp has the most capacity in establishing control over the risk variables for activities. And aquatics staff are, often solely, responsible for emergency response. In other words, a very large part of the camps control & response (risk management) in aquatics activities is through aquatics staffing

### **ASSESSING THE RISKS OF YOUR CAMPS AQUATICS ACTIVITIES**

The decision making process for staff hiring begins with taking a complete assessment of your aquatics programs, with a focus on careful determination of the risks, and the level of control that you have/want/need in order to ensure participant safety.

Just as not all camps are the same, not all aquatics programs are the same.... The staffing at your camp, for example, the numbers of lifeguards on duty or the types of lifeguards hired, must be based on the needs **specific to your program**...not modeled after the camp-down-the-lane....

Decisions for aquatics staffing must be made based on the needs of the *specific* program, taking into consideration all of the variables required to manage risk at *each* specific activity, program & site.

Assessment is a tool used to help determine your programs staffing needs, as well as helping to indicate program activity considerations, and define possible areas of risk.

The staffing decision making process begins with an assessment of

- Activity-Specific Risks & Requirements for EACH aquatics activity conducted
- The Facilities, Physical Location & Environment where EACH activity takes place
- The Participants in EACH aquatics activity

In order to...

1. Identify the specific risks and control & response required to manage the risks
2. Determine the staffing required to maintain the control identified
3. Determine the staffing required to provide the emergency response identified

### **Activity-Specific Risks & Requirements**

We start the assessment by looking at each aquatics activity in-and-of-itself.

#### **Identify Inherent Risks**

The inherent nature of the activity may create its own risks, “just because” it is what it is...

For example, all aquatics activities carry the risk of drowning simply by virtue of being aquatic.

Risks that are inherent to an activity may include the participant’s relationship to piece of equipment and/or to the water. For example, entrapment is a risk inherent to kayaking (using kayaks designed for river/whitewater) and squirt boating due to the types of boat used. The use of power boats & personal watercraft brings its own sets of hazards inherent to those activities by virtue of having motorized equipment. Scuba diving requires the use of air tanks and breathing equipment...You can’t offer the specific activity without using the equipment specifically designed for that activity, so those risks that are posed by the equipment are inherently part of the risks of the activity, and should be identified. (Remember that the next step after assessments will be to determine the type of staffing required in order to manage the risks. Note that just because a risk is inherent to the activity does not mean that risk controls cannot be put in place.)

#### **Identify Imposed Operational & Hiring Requirements**

There may be hiring and/or operating requirements that are imposed upon your organization by outside sources, such as standards set forth by an accrediting body, health department, your parent organization, licensing agency, local or federal employment regulations, or government entity. Certifying bodies may also have limits regarding how many participants may be supervised by a certified staff member for certain activities. You should identify what these requirements are, as they will impact staffing and/or activity management.

#### **Identify “Quirks” or Things That Are Unique To The Activity**

While not applicable to every camp, you may have an unusual activity, a unique delivery method, or something else about the activity which warrants specific identification of unique risks, as this will impact how the activity is supervised.

### **Facility/Physical Location/Environment**

Where does the activity take place, and what are the variables of this physical location which impact the risk to participants? The physical location of the activity, and surrounding environment, has tremendous impact in determining the risk management needs for the activity, and thus impacts staffing.

What are some of the facility/physical variables which impact ability to control an aquatics environment?

**Water Clarity/Visibility:** Water clarity impacts the ability for staff to see the participants, which can impact their ability to control participant behaviors and/or to respond to emergencies. Campers who become submerged in cloudy or murky water are harder for staff to see, thus harder to rescue. Staff have the highest level of control when the water is clean, clear, & smooth, with total visibility of participants in all areas (including can clearly see all the way to the bottom). Control decreases when visibility is disturbed for any reason, including from surface waves or sun-glare.

**Plant, Animal & Insect Hazards:** These include things such as aquatic plants, which can be an entrapment hazard for swimming and boaters, and/or impact visibility of participants by staff, as well as animals which may present a hazard, such as jellyfish, poisonous snakes, spiders, stinging insects, alligators, sharks, etc.

**Water Temperature:** You have seen the little kid in the pool with the blue lips... Water takes heat away from the human body at a rate that is 25 times faster than air. Participants who are being impacted by a drop in body temperature, of even a few degrees, may become mentally and/or physically impaired, thus creating a variety of risks to themselves, and to others. Colder water temperatures increase the risks to participants.

**Water Conditions & Hazards:** Tides, surface currents, underwater currents, as well as hazards occurring on rivers, such as strainers, holes, hydraulics, undercut rocks, or anything else that might make swimming, navigation or rescue difficult must be taken into consideration when looking at the risk of the activity, the level of staff control, and emergency response.

**Weather:** Weather can impact both indoor & outdoor aquatics environments. Rain, wind, and sun can impact visibility. Air temperature can impact participants' body temperature. Thunderstorms, major rainstorms, or other severe weather, can create different kinds of risk-from lightning to sudden rise in water levels on a river. Wind may impact participants ability to hear instructions and/or for the staff to hear shouts for assistance. It may also impact ability to navigate safely. Etc.

**Bottom Conditions & Depth:** Open water settings may have gently sloping beaches, or sudden drop-offs, rocky or "sucking-muck" bottoms that may create entrapment hazards, water depths can be unclear, or be deep enough to create difficulty with rescue, etc.

**Other Activities in Area Such as Motorized Watercraft, Multiple Activities, Public:** Aquatics areas with multiple uses can create some additional challenges for supervision & maintaining safety. For example, motorboats and personal watercraft can create wakes, creating hazards to swimmers & boaters, and impacting visibility, etc. Multiple activities can be distracting to staff, etc.

**Man-Made Hazards:** Can occur in both natural and man-made bodies of water. Low-head dams, underwater pipes, intake valves, construction debris, the remains of old bridges, garbage such as old refrigerators or cars, etc., clutter rivers throughout the US. Diving boards, slides, toys, and other pool equipment, as well as drains in pools and spas can create problems with visibility, or create dangerous situations. Some camps may also have problems created by the design or construction of the facility itself, such as slippery or uneven surfaces, obstructions, poor lighting, access steps/ladders/ramps, etc

**Physical Time To Emergency Services:** How far is the facility/activity located from EMS? How long will it take for them to get to a participant after 9-1-1 is called? Can you even call 9-1-1?... Obviously, the quicker the response time, the higher you score for "response"... Activities that take place where access to EMS is slow (20-60 minutes away) or remote areas where access is more than an hour away will require staff who have advanced medical training.

**Physical Size of the Facility & Location of Staff in Proximity to Participants:** How long will it take for the staff to get to a participant in the event that rescue is required? Can staff see, hear, and speak to all in their area of supervision? How long does it take for the staff to scan their area of responsibility? Etc.

Supervising staff should be positioned in proximity to participants so they can:

- see, hear, and speak to everyone they are supervising
- scan their area of responsibility in 30 seconds or less
- execute rescue in less than 1 minute.

Control, and response, decreases for any increments beyond these. *Any physical distance or other delay that means rescue would take more than 3 minutes to execute should not be tolerated!*

## **Who Are The Participants?**

What are the participant variables which impact your ability to control an aquatics activity and staffing needs? The participants have a great deal of impact on our ability to control the activity, and also can have an effect on emergency response.

**Participant Age:** will impact such things as ability to follow instructions, attention span, desire to learn, and ability to execute or master physical skills. Age may also impact the camper's physical ability, etc.

**Maturity of Participants:** may affect how a participant copes in an emergency, how they approach personal safety and risk-taking, if they recognize that they are having personal difficulty, roles that they may take in the event of a crisis that requires participant leadership or decision making, etc.

**Physical Ability & Condition:** What is the physical ability of each participant? Endurance level? What types of accommodations do you have to make if any? Can they "self-rescue"? Are there medical concerns? Etc.

**Physical Size:** The physical size of participants can impact the staff's ability to respond in an emergency, the number of staff required to execute a rescue, the type of emergency equipment required, etc.

**Mental Ability:** Do participants require additional supervision? Do they recognize hazards? Can they follow directions? Do participants require one-to-one supervision? Etc.

**Skill Level and Experience of Participants:** Are you dealing with never-evers, non-swimmers...or experienced participants...? Are they capable of self-rescue? What is their level or readiness for the activity? How are participants skills assessed? Etc.

**How Many Participants Are In The Activity?** The number of participants will impact control; staffing. Ideally, the number of participants should be determined by the control needed for the variables that impact the activity, rather than setting a number of participants and then trying to staff to meet that number.

Anything else unique to your program regarding participants should also be identified.

## **IDENTIFY CONTROL & RESPONSE REQUIRED TO MANAGE THE RISKS**

What do we need to do to manage the risks identified? Once the risks are identified, the next step is to decide how the risks are going to be managed, including how staff are going to be implemented. In terms of staffing, in this part of the process, you are essentially developing a staff "skills-sets" needs list.

The intended outcome is to increase control to its maximum, decreasing risk to participants as much as possible (while maintaining the balance and integrity of the program). This can be done in many ways, some of which are listed here:

- Increasing the number of staff
- Putting staff in closer proximity to participants (more supervision, faster rescue, etc)
- Lowering the number of participants in the activity
- Moving the activity to a different location
- Changing and/or modifying the program equipment used and/or how the equipment is used and/or providing additional equipment or gear
- Changing and/or modifying the rescue equipment used and/or how the equipment is used and/or providing additional equipment or gear
- Implementing/modifying requirements for participation in the activity
- Modify the time of day/time of year the activity is offered
- Implementing/modifying requirements for staff certifications and/or training
- Etc

## **DETERMINE THE STAFFING REQUIRED**

Once you have determined how risks are going to be managed, including how staff are going to be implemented - you have created the staff “skills-sets” needs list- create the job description and hire accordingly.

## **HIRING**

### **ALL aquatics staff should possess the following:**

- Maturity
- Ability to communicate well
- Good decision making skills
- Ability to work as part of a cohesive team
- Ability to relate in a positive manner with the clientele you serve
- Current certification(s) as applicable to the specific activity and body of water
- Physical and mental ability to perform the essential requirements of the job

**AND** each aquatics staff member must also be able to demonstrate the appropriate skills and knowledge through a skills evaluation that is conducted prior to the staff member performing the job duties at the beginning of the season

### **Before you hire...**

#### **-Know the requirements for:**

- staff age
- certifications/qualifications required *specific for the activity*
- supervisors-to-participant ratios
- certifications/qualifications required *specific for the body of water*
- hiring and/or operational requirements as set forth by any accrediting body, parent organization, licensing agency, or government entity as applicable to your program.

### **-Know the Certification(s): Make sure that you understand the differences in what the certification is good for, and what it is not applicable to!**

#### **Make sure that you get the correct certification**

- That matches *BOTH* the *specific activity AND* the body of water where the activity is to be conducted.
- For Boating: that the certification is for *BOTH* the correct type of craft *AND* the body of water where the activity is going to be conducted.
- As required, that the certification is the correct level/instructor certification appropriate to meet the standards for supervising the activity, as applicable.

And, for ACA Accredited camps: That is ACA approved certification. Just because it is available “out there in the world” does not mean it meets the ACA standards! Check the ACA list for which organizations/agencies and certifications are approved as meeting the ACA standards requirements BEFORE hiring or sending a staff member to a certification course! This information is available on the ACA website, or contact your sections Standards Chair. Use the pre-visit option & work with visitors ahead to make sure that you have all of your ducks in a row, and that they are also the right ducks!

**Risk Management Tip:** Never try to turn a certification in to something that it isn't, or push your staff beyond their level of training (and/or experience) as they are not qualified to handle supervision of activities, recognize hazards, or execute rescues beyond the level of their certification/training!

## **SKILLS VERIFICATION: Why Conduct Skills Verification?**

To make sure that the staff supervising aquatics areas know what they are doing, and that they possess the physical ability to perform the skills required, specifically in the areas of rescue and emergency response.

Aquatics certifications are issued based on the participant being able to successfully demonstrate a set of skills *at the time of the course*. While a general body of knowledge and ability might be implied, a certification should never be seen as an assurance that someone has retained all of the information and/or ability to perform the skills beyond the course.

“WEED-OUT” FALSE CERTIFICATIONS: A downside to computer technology is that it is now easy to produce fake certifications that look *exactly* like the real thing. However, while fairly easy to fake a document, in most cases they will not be able to fake the physical skills and knowledge needed to have gotten the certification in the first place...Through skills verification, it is easy for a trained instructor to recognize someone who does not have the body of knowledge required to be in possession of the certification in the first place...and to weed them out before they become a bigger problem!...

### **TIPS TO WEEDING OUT FAKE CERTIFICATIONS...**

- Never accept a photo-copy as proof of certification! Require staff to provide the original certification document, which you can verify and photo copy for your files, and then return the original to them.
- Always check for both sides of two-sided certification cards, and that all pages of any that are multiple-page documents are there.
- Look for inconsistencies on each certification-if the issuing organization’s policy is that it only types the names on the cards and you get one with a hand-written name...or the date of the course they attended does not match when the card expires...or something looks like white-out....
- When in doubt, check it out!- Trust your instincts-if something just doesn’t seem right, call the organization that issued the certification and confirm.

### **Who & When?**

Skills Verification should apply to all lifeguards and aquatics activity leaders regardless of where, or when, they were certified and should include year-round and returning camp staff. Skills verification can occur either as part of the applicant screening process, or on site after hire, but always prior to the performance of job duties. All skills should be verified with EACH aquatics staff member PRIOR to performing any aquatics supervision duties EACH summer.

### **WHO CONDUCTS THE TRAINING?**

Skills verification and in-service training should be conducted, and supervised by, an adult(s) who has skills and current certification(s) at the Instructor/Instructor Trainer level as applicable to the *specific* activity and body of water. For example, a lifeguard’s skills should be assessed and verified by a currently certified Lifeguard Instructor or Instructor Trainer (who is certified as an LGI/IT for the specific body of water). Other aquatics activity leader’s skills should be verified by a currently certified Instructor or Instructor Trainer who is certified for the specific craft/activity and specific body of water for where the activity will be conducted.

### **What about the training being conducted by someone who has held a previous certification but is now “expired”, or “has years of experience” but no formal training?**

Current certification is strongly recommended. The downside of using someone who is “expired” is that they may not be aware of changes in techniques, curriculum, new or improved skills, trends, etc. as applicable to the activity. Just as any other “high risk” activity area in camp, failure of your aquatics staff to teach and/or use appropriate skills and/or current techniques may be considered as a form of negligence in the event of an accident. Further, the camps inability to prove that the staff member was aware of the current and appropriate practices through documentation of specific training and certification can be detrimental to the camp if an accident occurs!

## **WHAT SHOULD BE COVERED FOR SKILLS VERIFICATION?**

The focus of skills verification should be on safety skills and ability required to conduct the activity related to the certification, and should not be confused with pre-camp or training topics that they would learn after employment. In general, because all of the skills for a lifeguard are safety and rescue oriented, lifeguards should be able to perform each of the skills that were taught as part of their certification, including all in-water skills, CPR, and emergency care. Staff supervising other activities should be able to demonstrate and execute rescues, as well as all emergency procedures as applicable to the activities and body of water.

## **IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

In-service training, with hands-on practice of rescue skills, is a critical part of maintaining lifeguard and aquatics staff skills and knowledge. (And is especially important for those staff who only guard/supervise during the summer camp season, as they tend to lose knowledge and physical skills during the off-season.) In-service training and skills practice should take place throughout the summer camp season for ALL aquatics staff. Various methods can be implemented to conduct in-service training, from games to skills competitions; what is important is that aquatics staff practice, and are observed doing, specific skills.

## **-ACCIDENT PREVENTION TRAINING**

**The single most important job of your aquatics staff is keeping a close watch over the participants in order to keep them safe.** Thus, the majority of an aquatic staff member's time and energy while on the job should be devoted to prevention of accidents, rather than on rescue.

Accident prevention strategies and participant supervision should be a regular key topic in training of aquatics staff. Points to cover include:

- Camper accountability; For example: buddy checks, attendance, etc.
- Providing effective surveillance: where are staff positioned? How do they "rotate"?
- Surveillance: RID, 10/20 rule, 30 second rule
- How to interact properly with patrons (campers & staff) while on duty, without becoming distracted or interrupting effective surveillance
- Victim Recognition: How to spot a potential problem, common behaviors of victims
- Areas of Responsibility: who is watching what areas, which participants
- Common problems that you may encounter due to nature of activities, clientele, facility, etc.
- Health and Wellness: so that staff are alert and "refreshed" to do their job
- Dealing with environmental hazards: sun glare, water clarity, weather conditions, etc.
- Any other items specific to the activity, location, participants, etc for your program

## **-RESCUE BREATHING AND CPR REVIEW**

A review of Rescue Breathing, CPR, & AED use (and if your facility provides oxygen, review the use of this as well) should be conducted regularly (at least once every 2 weeks) for all lifeguards and aquatics tripping staff. Sessions should include a review of the timing (number of breaths, compressions, etc), hand placement for CPR, compressions, and preventing disease transmission. Be sure training includes review of skills that are age-appropriate for the participants you serve. It is a good idea to inspect all related equipment during these reviews too!

## **-UNANNOUNCED MOCK DROWNING SCENARIOS**

Mock drowning scenarios are effective ways to make sure that aquatics staff are really on their toes, as it puts them in a "real life" situation where they must respond just like if a real accident has occurred. It will show if staff respond correctly, if they work together as a team, and how well they follow and implement your camps emergency procedures. Scenarios should include all "components" of an actual near-drowning/accident from victim recognition to completion of appropriate care. Aquatics staff should be expected to act as they would in a "real" situation, and to include all aspects of the rescue.

- The element of surprise is critical to the success of this type of practice.
- For safety, be sure to have a lifeguard guarding the scenario. A certified lifeguard who is designated on location at the time of the scenario should be responsible to ensure the safety of the scenario participants....just in case....
- Key staff (such as the Program Director, Camp Director, and Nurses) should be informed prior to the drill taking place. This is so that EMS is not accidentally activated for real! (unless you have pre-arranged to include them)
- In order to provide support documentation of the skills assessed, the scenarios should be written down and kept on file with the training information.
- At the conclusion of each mock drowning drill, all campers and staff who were at the facility and the vicinity, should be “de-briefed” and clearly informed that this was a drill only, and that it was conducted as an intentional part of staff training. Everyone should have a very clear understanding that there was no actual emergency!

## **-SPINAL INJURY MANAGEMENT**

Spinal injury management is often the most difficult set of skills for lifeguards to master, and retain. Unlike most other situations, when dealing with spinal injuries, rescue must be executed with flawless precision! And, because spinal injury management requires more than one rescuer to complete, this precision must occur within the framework of working as a team. Regular practice of these skills becomes even more critical in camps where lifeguards are rotated and/or change each activity period, as spinal injury management requires strong teamwork. Some aspect of spinal injury management should be reviewed and practiced by each aquatics staff “group” at least once a week. Topics should include in-water practice of victim stabilization in all depths of water, with victims found both face-up and face-down, in all aquatics activity areas, and back boarding in all depths of water as applicable to your facility/program.

## **DOCUMENTING SKILLS VERIFICATION & IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

Skills verification & in-service training should be documented in writing for each staff person. It is recommended that each staff member have an individual verification check-list for each area that they will be guarding/supervising, rather than a group “sign-in” type of list. In the event of an accident, it will be more beneficial to the camp to be able to show that the individual staff person was observed and their individual skills documented, rather than having been observed “as a group”.

## **AQUATICS STAFF WITH DEFICIENT SKILLS**

**Because of the risk involved, these staff should not be permitted to guard or supervise until the deficiencies are corrected.** Whenever possible, put a plan in place to re-train the guard, and/or to work on skills areas. This is not a case where a “warm body is better than no body”...re-assign unqualified guards to other areas, or remove them from camp.

## **GOOD THINGS TO KNOW...**

**The 30 second rule:** A lifeguard/supervisor should be able to provide effective surveillance (scan) of their entire area of responsibility from the farthest extremes from one side to the opposite side of this area and back within 30 seconds.

**The 10/20 rule:** A lifeguard, while providing continuous and effective surveillance, must be able to assess the potential victim’s distress and be able to determine if help is required within 10 seconds. And, if help is required, the lifeguard must be able to affect rescue within 20 seconds. (Lifeguards should be stationed where they can respond anywhere in his/her area of responsibility within 20 seconds)

**The RID factor:** When an incident occurs at a lifeguard supervised facility, and is not immediately recognized by the lifeguard, it is typically due to one of three factors:

**R=Recognition**-lifeguard fails to recognize the victims distress or the potential for the incident

**I=Intrusion**-lifeguard fails to recognize the incident due to doing other duties that intruded upon their ability to provide effective surveillance

**D=Distraction**-lifeguard fails to recognize the incident because they became distracted, which affected their level of attention and ability to provide effective surveillance