

Aquatic Procedures and Emergency Plan Overview

Legal Reference:

R 400.11411 Aquatic procedures.

(1) A camp shall classify each camper according to aquatic ability before the camper engages in an aquatic activity. All campers and staff are considered non-swimmers unless tested.

(2) A camp shall not permit a camper to participate in an aquatic activity that requires higher skills than the camper's swimming classification, except during formal instruction.

(3) A camp shall establish and enforce an accounting system, such as the buddy system, for supervising campers involved in an aquatic activity. The system used shall include all of the following:

- (a) Procedures for camper check-in.
- (b) Procedures for camper check-out.
- (c) The periodic accounting for the whereabouts of each camper by a member of the aquatic staff. Aquatic staff shall conduct checks and account for campers at least once every 10 minutes.

(4) A camp shall establish and follow a written aquatic emergency plan for each aquatic activity. The plan shall cover all of the following areas:

- (a) Rescue procedures and frequency of drills.
- (b) Camper accountability.
- (c) Prompt evacuation.
- (d) Notification of outside emergency services.

(5) A camp shall use an accounting system as defined in subrule (3) of this rule for supervising camper swimming at sites other than a permanent camp waterfront. One aquatic observer shall assist an aquatic supervisor for every 10 campers or fraction thereof in the water. Aquatic staff shall account for campers at least once every 5 minutes.

Technical Assistance:

The aquatics procedures required under R 400.11411 include written, practiced, and specific procedures designed to reduce the potential for injury or death in aquatic activities. Aquatic activities are one of the highest risk activity areas within children's camp programs. Camp organizers must recognize the risks of this area by developing and following aquatic procedures that must be focused on prevention of aquatic emergencies and consider:

- classification of each swimmer.

- regular accounting of the swimmers while participating in aquatic activities using an accounting system (check in, check out, safety checks at least every 10 minutes).
- adaptation of the accounting system at remote aquatic areas.
- limiting swimming to only day light hours.
- diving restrictions.

See R 400.11411 for complete list of requirements of the aquatic procedures that must be written in detail within the High Adventure Statement for each aquatic activity as referenced in R 400.11401(2).

In addition to the aquatic procedures identified in R 400.11411. A camp is responsible to establish and follow a written aquatic emergency plan for each aquatic activity as well as provide an aquatic supervisor for each activity [R 400.11405(1)]. "Aquatic activities" means that participants swim or use watercraft on lakes, rivers, pools, oceans, or ponds. These activities may include but are not limited to swimming, watercraft [R 400.11101(1)(r)], floating inflatable equipment (blobs, obstacle courses, mats) and waterslides. Aquatic activities also include wading within water which may result in unsafe or unknown conditions causing drowning. Fishing from shore or from a stable, fixed and/or permanently anchored dock connected to shore would not be considered an aquatic activity. Each plan must include the following areas:

- A) *Rescue procedures and frequency of drills.* Rescue procedures are specific actions that staff will follow to respond to an aquatic emergency. The rescue procedures include activation of the emergency plan and responsibilities for each staff member within the emergency plan. In addition, the plan must include the frequency of practicing the rescue procedures in drills.
- B) *Camper accountability.* The camper accountability system identified in R 400.11411(3) used within each aquatic activity is written and used to identify how campers are accounted for during the aquatic activity and in emergency response. When staff are responding to an emergency, designated staff must continue to supervise and care for the needs of the campers. Camper accountability describes the camp's responsibility to the campers who are victims in the emergency as well as the campers who are not directly involved.
- C) *Prompt evacuation.* The aquatic emergency plan includes steps for prompt evacuation of campers and supervising staff from the activity area. The prompt evacuation steps include a notification signal as well as a designated safe relocation gathering area.
- D) *Notification of outside emergency services.* The aquatic emergency plan must include steps for notification of outside emergency services. Outside emergency services means advanced emergency medical services and community first responders that can assist during emergencies. Activating

emergency services usually involves dialing the 911 emergency phone number. The plan must describe when should the call be made, who should call, and how the call is made.

What types of emergencies might occur around the camp waterfront, pool, or remote waterfront activities?

Aquatic emergencies may include but are not limited to drowning, lost swimmer, capsized watercraft, suspected neck injury, distressed swimmer, or severe weather. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists drowning as a leading cause of death in youth⁽¹⁾. Additionally, the CDC acknowledges that drownings are less likely to occur at beaches that are supervised by certified lifeguards⁽²⁾. Aquatic emergency plans are required to be understood and practiced by all staff involved in supervision and care of campers within aquatic activities. The aquatic supervisor trains all staff during pre-camp staff training on each aquatic emergency plan and schedules on-going practice at regular intervals throughout the summer sessions. Many camps include the aquatic emergency plan within each aquatic high adventure statement required under R 400.11401(2).

(1) The CDC Childhood Injury Report: Patterns of Unintentional Injuries among 0-19 Year Olds in the United States, 2000-2006 is a publication of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

(2) Branche CM, Stewart S, editors. [Lifeguard effectiveness: A report of the working groupCdc-pdf](#). Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2001.

Sample:

Aquatic Procedures and Emergency Plan

Aquatic Area: Waterfront/Swimming Procedures and Emergency Plan

Aquatic Procedures: General Rules

- 1) No barefoot allowed going to or coming from the waterfront! Campers outside the swimming area must always wear something on their feet.
- 2) All swimming and watercraft activities must be supervised by a minimum of two responsible adults. At least one of the adults must be a certified lifeguard and also certified in CPR and first aid. Additional non-certified aquatic observers must be used as look outs based on the number of swimmers. The ratio of aquatic observers to aquatic participants must be 1:10 minimum. The ratio of certified lifeguards to aquatic participants is 1:25.
- 3) No running or jumping on the waterfront steps.
- 4) Line up in a quiet and orderly fashion on the deck until the buddy-board lifeguard lets you in.
- 5) Enter and leave the waterfront area only through the gate with your counselor. Do not go over or under or around the fence.
- 6) Personal items (towels, shoes, glasses, watches, etc.) may be left on the waterfront deck. It's unsafe to wear chains or dangling earrings while swimming.
- 7) Campers may not chew gum or have candy in their mouth while swimming.
- 8) Campers are not to talk, bother, splash or distract the lifeguards; they have an important job to do!
- 9) Stay off and away from the rope separating the shallow from the deep. Do not go over or under the rope for any reason.
- 10) Do not swim under the dock.
- 11) Remain within the swimming enclosures.
- 12) Stay out of the boathouse.
- 13) All occupants of any watercraft must wear a properly fitted lifejacket at all times.
- 14) No head-first diving.
- 15) Do not pass waterfront boundaries with out permission of waterfront staff.

Swim Test Procedures

- 1) All campers must complete a swim test before participation in aquatic activities. This swim test classifies swimmers according to their ability. All campers and staff are considered non-swimmers unless tested.
- 2) The swim test is a 25 yard swim across the swim area. The participant can use the free style stroke without touching the ground during the test.
- 3) A certified lifeguard or waterfront director will be classifying the swimmer based on the swimmer's ability.

- a. A red swimmer designation means a swimmer that lacks the ability to swim the distance of the test without assistance, breaks, or touching with their feet.
 - b. A white swimmer designation means a swimmer that has the ability to swim the distance of the test.
- 4) White Swimmers can participate in both the shallow and deep areas of the waterfront and watercraft without an adult.
 - 5) Red Swimmers can participate in the shallow area and if using the deep area will need to wear a properly fitted and approved PFD. Red swimmers may participate in watercraft with an adult with them. Both the red swimmer and the adult must wear a properly fitted lifejacket at all times while on or in the watercraft.

Buddy System (Accounting System)

1. Everyone in the swimming area must check in and check out on the buddy boards with the staff member in charge of the buddy board. They must always swim only in the area into which they are checked.
2. To Check In: Buddies will present their tags together to the staff member in charge of the buddy board. The staff member will place the tags on the board in the appropriate area.
3. To change areas: the buddies go to the Buddy Board, inform the staff member in charge of the buddy board that they wish to switch areas who will then move the tags. Then they will swim in the new area.
4. Buddies must swim together in the same area. Always keep your eye on your buddy; you are your buddies' best lifeguard!
5. At the sounding of the buddy call, buddies raise their hands high together, and are completely SILENT until the sounding of the OK signal (2 blasts from the Waterfront Director's whistle.)
6. Water Mat:
 - a. Only 12 campers allowed on the water Mat at one time.
 - b. All campers must be wearing a lifejacket.
 - c. There should not be any pushing on the water mat.
 - d. Never swim underneath the water mat.
7. Buddy Checks are conducted at least every 10 minutes.

Free Swim Procedures

- 1) Campers must line up behind buddy boards with their buddies in a quiet and orderly fashion.
- 2) As soon as all guards are ready at their posts, the Waterfront Director will tell the buddy board guard to let the campers in. Lifeguards will be on duty, ready to perform their assigned jobs, as soon as the first campers have given their tags to the staff member in charge of the buddy board.

- 3) Buddies will present their tags together to the staff member in charge of the buddy board. The staff member will place the tags on the board in the appropriate area.
- 4) Every 7-10 minutes the Waterfront Director will sound a buddy call. At any time, the waterfront director may choose to have an emergency buddy call if the situation warrants.
 - a. Buddy calls begin with a blast from the air horn on the waterfront director tower. From this point on, all campers are silent and remain still for counting. Campers raise their hands high, clasped with those of their buddy (buddies).
 - b. Guards count the number of doubles and triples in their assigned area.
 - c. When guards of an area agree on the total count, an assigned guard in each area calls the numbers to the waterfront director when prompted.
 - d. When calling numbers, always call doubles first and triples second. Hence, a call of "14 and 3 deep" means that there are 14 doubles and 3 triples swimming in that area.
 - e. The waterfront director will receive the calls from the assigned guards. The waterfront director will call the total for each area to the buddy board life guard. The waterfront director will call the deep totals first; the shallow totals second.
 - f. While the other guards have been counting campers, the buddy board guard(s) have been counting buddy tags. He/she should have the totals ready before the waterfront director calls out the grand totals. If everything agrees the buddy board guard calls out "check, check; check, check" (deep then shallow). If it doesn't check, he/she first states what does check, then he/she quickly states the nature of the error by calling out such things as "recount deep" or "recount triples in the deep".
 - g. The waterfront director calls out the revised totals if an error is found, and if it checks the buddy board life guard calls out "check, check". This does not signify the end of the buddy call! If the totals do not check by the third attempt, immediately implement the emergency procedures outlined below.
 - h. If all campers are properly accounted for, the waterfront director can use this chance to explain the problem to the campers and/or remind them that they must remain silent and still during buddy call. A change of guard position can also occur at this time.
 - i. The waterfront director blows 2 short blasts on his whistle, signifying the end of the buddy call.

Note: A buddy call should never take no more than one minute. Speed is essential but be sure to count accurately.
5. At the last buddy call, the waterfront director will tell the swimmers to check out. Again, they must do so quickly so the buddy boards are cleared, and all swimmers accounted for. Once the boards are cleared, the buddy board

guard informs the waterfront director. Guards must still remain at posts until dismissed by the waterfront director.

6. Occasionally, the waterfront director may call for a short meeting of the lifeguarding staff. If not, the waterfront director will dismiss guards from their posts. Guards may not leave until they are dismissed.

Note: Guards must remain alert at all times! When a staff member assumes a guard post, he/she is no longer a counselor but is a waterfront lifeguard. Focus on this role completely for the entire free swim! Be aware of all swimmers in your assigned area and be on a constant watch for unsafe behavior and for campers swimming without/apart from a buddy. Day-dreaming and talking is not allowed. Guards at the buddy boards must be constantly aware of camper traffic around the buddy boards. Guards must not let any campers touch the buddy tags on the board at any time. Only guards place tags on the board or remove them when the swimmers are finished swimming. Buddy board guards are not allowed to sit on the steps while on duty.

Emergency Procedures

Buddy Call Totals Do Not “Check”

If totals do not check during a buddy call, ***the emergency call procedures will immediately be implemented.*** If a camper cannot find his/her buddy, the waterfront director will *immediately call for a buddy call.* *If the buddy call counts do not confirm the buddy tags on the buddy board as the same number of swimmers in the water, the emergency call procedures will be immediately implemented.*

Emergency Procedures/Lost Swimmer Search

- 1) When a buddy call reveals the number on the buddy board does not agree with the number of swimmers, OR, when a swimmer cannot find his/her buddy, it is absolutely essential that staff move calmly, but quickly and implement the lost swimmer search. Submersion can cause permanent brain damage due to oxygen deprivation and potential death in just a few minutes. A buddy call, takes precious time; it is essential that these procedures happen quickly. If we must conduct a search, it must be conducted efficiently. There will be an emphasis on this at staff training, as well as practiced throughout the summer.
- 2) When the lost swimmer search is initiated, the buddy board guard must contact by radio (the camp director and designated staff). The camp director or their designee will immediately contact 9-1-1. They will then sound the camp emergency siren indicating an emergency. All staff will immediately report to their assigned emergency positions. All campers will immediately report to the central area/ball field and line up in their cabin groups.

- 3) The procedure for the lost swimmers' search will be demonstrated and practiced during staff training and will be practiced throughout the summer. All staff on guard duty for that free swim, as well as any other staff present, will be assigned to the search team. The waterfront director will assign each staff a position on the sweep line, and the team will conduct a quick and thorough sweep of the entire swimming area (and the areas directly under the docks and recreational floating objects.) The search will begin in the deepest areas and progress to the shallowest swimming areas.
- 4) All other available staff with any waterfront credentials should immediately go to the waterfront to assist. Staff not holding any waterfront certification will accompany campers at the central area/ball field. They will keep the campers away from the emergency, calm and engaged. As there is a likelihood of emergency vehicles entering our camp, it is vital that the campers not be in the way of these vehicles. These staff members are also playing an essential role in this emergency.
- 5) In all likelihood, campers will become upset during this procedure.. It is very important for staff to respond appropriately to these legitimate camper concerns.

Aquatic Area: Boating/Canoe Procedures and Emergency Plan

Watercraft (Boats and Canoes) Procedures

- 1) A certified lifeguard must be supervising the watercrafts in use.
- 2) Watercraft lifeguard must ensure all participants are wearing lifejackets. The lifejackets must be appropriately sized, coast guard approved, and in good condition.
- 3) All watercraft activities must only occur during daylight hours.
- 4) The watercraft are not allowed in the swimming areas.
- 5) No standing in watercraft is allowed.
- 6) If three or more boats and/or canoes are in use, a watercraft lifeguard must be launched and on the water for emergencies. This is in addition to the watercraft guard on land to assist with docking and launching.
- 7) A rescue watercraft (rowboat) appropriate for emergency response should always be available and ready for use. The rowboat must be prepped with its oars and lifejackets ready for emergency use, if needed.
- 8) During Buddy Checks, the watercraft should become quiet to not distract the check. The land watercraft lifeguard gets a count of the boats and canoes providing a count to the waterfront director. These numbers are conveyed to the buddy board for "check, check".

Emergency Procedures for Capsized Watercraft

- 1) Upon notice of a capsized watercraft, the watercraft lifeguard notifies waterfront staff of the emergency with a long whistle blow. This signal will alert all watercraft not in distress to immediately take their boats to shore, pull them up, and wait by their boats on shore for staff to assist them or give further instructions.
- 2) The watercraft lifeguard launches the emergency response watercraft to assist the capsized boat occupants. The waterfront director will determine what resources are needed to assist and designate available staff to support the emergency response.
- 3) All watercraft participants must be wearing lifejackets. Quick response is needed in all aquatic emergencies.
- 4) First priority is to ensure safety for the watercraft occupants that have capsized. Use the throw bags and reach devices to assist the occupants to the rescue boat. It can be difficult to assist individuals from the water into the rescue boat. At times, injuries can result from this procedure. If necessary, wait with participants holding onto the emergency boat until other resources can come and assist.
- 5) Notify the waterfront director immediately if there are any life-threatening injuries, so that the waterfront director can direct appropriate staff to contact 911. If injuries are non-life threatening, provide first aid and consult with the health officer and waterfront director about appropriate treatment.

Aquatic Area: Severe Weather

Weather conditions are monitored 24 hours daily by support staff. All staff will be alerted to severe weather watches (i.e. conditions are favorable for severe weather, but such has not been reported yet). Waterfront activities may proceed during severe weather watches as long as there is heightened awareness of the weather conditions, and campers can be removed quickly from the water if weather conditions deteriorate.

In the event of a severe weather warning (i.e. severe weather has been reported) or conditions determined by the waterfront director are no longer safe enough to operate the waterfront.

1. The waterfront director signals a buddy check and conducts a orderly and quick end of aquatic activity process. All campers are cleared from the activity area through the buddy boards or other check in/out process.
2. Once all campers are accounted for, the lifeguards will be dismissed by the waterfront director.
3. Campers and staff shall report to the safe areas designated by the severe weather plan, or if necessary, the immediate proximate safe area.