

Safety Tip of the Month – December 2008
VSI Safety Committee
“Accident Statistics: What They Tell Us”

Accident statistics are very boring. Numbers are worse. Yet each of those incidents was an injury, usually to a child. If we thought about the children who were hurt, all of us would feel upset. As a statistic, it is not painful at all. Fortunately, most injuries are minor. Statistics are not attention grabbers unless you are a politician up for election. To get the meat from the numbers requires an application in reality - The reality of your situation. In the current vernacular, "What's in it for me?"

There is something in that set of numbers for you. There is a lot of information in those statistics. The most significant for me is the number of accidents at meets. Compare this to the number of accidents at workouts. Then think about the time spent at each. Over half of the accidents occur at swim meets. This has been a consistent trend. We know that half of our time is not spent at swim meets. Yet our injury rate at meets is almost twice as high. Assuming that you go to one meet every two weeks (a pretty aggressive schedule), that is only two days out of ten (assuming one workout per weekday, none on weekends). It would appear that an activity that accounts for twenty percent of our time results in well over half our injuries! The analysis is not really that simple; there are many variables. The point of the statistic is that injuries are far more common at swim meets than at any other time.

We should be able to get our accidents at meets down to the same level as we have at practice. Then more swimmers would stay in the water; would stay on the team; would progress without an interrupted training program; would have less pain. Why do we have more accidents at meets? That is a question you should think about. This is a problem that should concern everyone. The statistical breakdown also shows the problem is present in all age groups.

What can you do? How does it affect you? Be alert for potential problems. If the 10-and-Unders are roughhousing in the warm up tank, say something. If there is no Marshal, tell the Meet Director. Set a good example yourself. Make sure that your kids walk, not run, on the deck. The key is to address the issue before it becomes a problem. If you raise the safety awareness of everyone, it is synergistic. You can help. Don't nag; be aware. Most accidents occur when you are not aware of the danger and not thinking about the potential. Be cautious and considerate of others. If you see something that has potential to cause an accident or injury, don't be afraid to speak up to the Marshal, Meet Director or Coach.

If we are aware of the risks all the time, we can be safer. Swimming is a very competitive sport. There will be some injuries as people push themselves to higher levels of performance. We want to avoid the unnecessary, the avoidable injury. When everyone starts to think about safety as part of their responsibility, it will help. The injury rates will drop, we spend more time WATCHING our swimmers rather than treating them for injuries, and more swimmers stay in the water."