

Safety Tip of the Month – October 2008
VSI Safety Committee
“Planning for Meet Safety”

Planning will reduce the number of potential risk exposures that are present in different environments. A facilities safety inspection or walk-through is a great place to start planning for swim meet safety. Keep in mind that the facility might have its own safety inspection process and that should be included in the swim team planning process.

However, a swimming meet involves a large number of people with different perspectives toward the facility, so the swim team should not assume that the facility will recognize some of the potential exposures. An inspection or walk-through will heighten awareness of potential problems such as broken equipment, crowded hallways, or swinging door (without window), so that warning signs or barriers can be posted. It is also possible that through daily exposure to a facility, some potential risks become so familiar to the staff that they are not noticed, e.g. broken tiles, chemicals in unlocked closet, loose stone on steps / walkway going into pool, bleachers that are wobbly and that could result in fall. Therefore, try to include a person in the walk-through who is not a daily facility user, because they will see the facility from a fresh perspective.

There are many ways to enhance your powers of observation and to broaden your own perspective regarding the facility. Look at it as if you are a swimmer, a parent, a coach or an official. Take a ten-year old with you on a walk-through and observe what areas attract their attention. Sit in the bleachers, look at the facility and write down what you see. Stand behind a starting block and observe the facility from a different angle.

Common sense and observation will go far toward developing a meet safety plan. Walk-through and note areas of concern, then focus on specifics. Write an action plan to ensure that such areas will be properly marked with appropriate signs or will be adequately secured. Ask questions such as, "How can we route traffic around this area?" After the initial inspection, write a checklist that can be used before the meet begins. USA Swimming has examples of safety checklists that can be adapted to meet the needs of individual clubs.