

Safety Tip of the Month – September 2008
VSI Safety Committee
“Facility Safety and Emergency Planning”

Accidents seldom "just happen," and many can be prevented. According to the National Safety Council, 85 percent of all accidents are preventable; accidents that might have occurred are prevented or reduced by those who develop and execute risk management programs.

WHY HAVE A PLAN?

With a risk management plan, you will be taking a proactive approach to managing accidents. You will project an attitude that says:

- We are knowledgeable professionals
- We are concerned for your safety
- We will do what is necessary to provide a safe environment

Other benefits include:

- Increased safety for all participants
- Reduced losses to USA Swimming
- High appeal of swimming to potential participants
- Easier monitoring of claims, losses and insurance coverage

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PLAN?

There is an old adage that states, "Everyone's responsibility is no one's responsibility." There is irony in that statement when it comes to risk management, because for such a plan to work, everyone in the organization needs to be involved. No program of this nature can be successful without the complete cooperation and understanding of all members.

USA Swimming shows its commitment to safety and risk management in all areas of the organization. At the national level, USA Swimming has established the Safety Education Committee, a standing committee. This committee's role is to determine the best method to develop and monitor a risk management plan. Since this program began in 1984 as a task force, it has had a powerful impact on policies and procedures adopted within USA Swimming.

The Local Swimming Committee (LSC) and its Safety Chair play a vital role in risk management planning and execution. The Safety Chair generally has the most influence and control over habits and attitudes throughout the local area. The Chair is responsible for providing leadership in coordinating training and distributing information to all member clubs, coaches and officials in the LSC. A strong leader in this position will spell success for the LSCs overall safety program. To further be effective, the coach, Club Safety Coordinator, Meet Director, Referee and Safety Marshals are required to address safety where events are held. Their involvement comes in different, but daily contact with each other and determines the overall success of the safety program.

To ensure that all swimmers are aware of the concerns for their safety, it is recommended that you seek their input. Encourage swimmers to discuss any area they perceive to be a problem so immediate corrective steps can be taken.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

A risk management plan should contain procedures in prevention, proper care of the victim and supervision of the facility. Every type of emergency that could occur should be considered when planning for emergencies. A detailed plan should be put in writing and thoroughly reviewed and practiced by all members involved.

The following points should be considered when developing a plan:

Safety Rules and Regulations: You can assist in the safe operation of the program by establishing and adhering to rules and regulations. Facility and USA Swimming policies are designed to minimize the risk of injury.

Assemble all the safety rules and regulations pertaining to the facility and USA Swimming. Review all rules and regulations and the procedures used to enforce them. Post and/or publish appropriate rules and procedures, e.g., warm-up procedures. Review the facility's signage, including directional and warning, to see if it is adequate and meets current regulations.

Supervision: Supervision provides the highest level of service, using only qualified leaders and volunteers in accord with the best standard of care possible. Coaches and meet marshals should be active in enforcing rules and regulations, such as the warm-up procedures. The Club Safety Coordinator can act as liaison between the club and facility manager in developing such plans. Continual communication between individuals will instill a quality program.

Training: Currently USA Swimming requires that coaches be certified in Safety Training for Swim Coaches, First Aid and CPR. This training should be encouraged to all participants. Swimmers, officials and parents can support the program by receiving this training.

Safety Inspections: The first step toward actively preventing injuries is to recognize potential hazards. This requires a systematic and routine method of inspecting the swimming facility. First determine what is to be inspected and how often. Then develop a series of check lists and establish a method of reporting faulty equipment.

As defined in the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations, the "Swimming Venue" is: "The area located on the sides and ends of the pool, spectator areas, team areas within the pool facility (e.g., portion of the building designated for teams and swimmer, or fenced around pool), locker rooms, and such other areas as may be specifically designated by the host club or organization, meet director, or referee."

A typical inspection report form such as the one below has been found to be quite useful if followed in the line-by-line sequence. It allows the inspector the opportunity to stop and return without duplicating or missing an area.

Locker Rooms

- Do floors drain well?
- Do floors and steps have non-slip texture?
- Are benches secured to floor or wall?
- Are lockers secured to floor or wall?
- Do steps have rails available? Are they secure?
- Adequate lighting?
- Are electrical fixtures fitted with Ground Fault Interrupter?
- Is emergency lighting available? Working?

- Are storage and chemical rooms locked at all times?

Pool Deck

- Is the pool deck clean?
- Does the deck drain well?
- Does it have standing water?
- Are decks slippery?
- Is the deck free from obstructions?
- Is the pool and deck light adequate?
- Are depth markers properly marked?
- Are starting blocks secure and covered to prevent improper use?
- Does the electrical system have Ground Fault Interrupter?
- Are timing system cords free from tripping?

Pool Bottom

- Is the pool drain covered and secure?
- Has a smooth surface?

Ladders and Steps

- Are ladders secure?
- Are pool steps recessed?

Safety Equipment

- Is the first aid kit properly stocked with supplies?
- Is a telephone available?
- Are emergency phone numbers properly displayed?
- Is safety equipment available and in good repair?
- Are rules posted?

Concession Area

- Free of glass containers?
- Are electrical cords taped down?
- Are emergency doors being blocked?
- Arrange equipment and other obstacles so they are not obstacles

Parking Lot

- Outdoor steps and walkways in good repair?
- Is the pool and deck light adequate?
- Do steps have rails available?
- Are they secure?

Supervision

- Lifeguards and/or marshals on duty?
- Coaches providing proper supervision?

Your particular venue may have unique conditions that should be considered when developing your inspection report. Carefully document each inspection scheduled, as they are evidence of reasonable care. Keep duplicate copies of inspection reports, incident reports, etc. Keep the duplicates in a separate storage area than the originals.

Emergency Procedures: It is important to construct a general plan that will help you handle emergencies. The key components of the plan will include:

Communication System: How will you get the attention of others during an emergency? Where is the phone located? What numbers do you call?

Rescue Equipment: Is rescue equipment easily accessible? Does everyone know how to use it? Is it adequate to meet the needs for the event being held?

Accessibility of the Facility: Plan how the rescue personnel can enter the pool facility most quickly. If it is via a locked gate, who has the keys?

Emergency Support Personnel: Who is expected to respond to an emergency? Have they been trained in CPR, first aid, and Emergency Water Safety (Safety Training for Swim Coaches) skills?

Accident prevention begins with managing risks at your facility as well as risks of any activity that occurs in or around your facility. Develop a procedure for handling different types of emergencies and adapt it to all settings.

Incident Reporting: USA Swimming requires that incidents be reported on a Report of Occurrence form during all meets, practices or club functions. When completing a report, state the facts in an objective and unbiased manner, and provide sufficient detail to allow for analysis and appraisal. Do not ask for or record opinions and comments on how such an accident might be prevented in the future.

Send a completed copy of the Report of Occurrence to the Local Swimming Committee Safety Chair, USA Swimming Headquarters and Risk Management Services, Inc. If the aquatic facility requires a separate report form, please attach with the Report of Occurrence.

A good risk management program does not cost, but saves. Concentrate on providing the participants the safest experience possible.