

Safety Tip of the Month – March 2010
VSI Safety Committee
“Take Care of Our Feet - They Are the Only Set We Will Have”

Proper footwear improves health of our feet and decreases the incidence of toe, foot, and lower leg injuries.

Some of the latest fashion footwear for children involves an ankle-high shoe with a wheel on the rear (heel) end of the shoe. This wheel permits the child to, after taking a running start, “roll” on one wheel when the toe side of the foot is lifted a bit. When the entire body weight is resting on two shoe wheels, which are centered over the heels, there is a much higher risk of lost balance, which would result in a backwards fall stopped only when the elbows or the back of the head crashes into the floor. Such a head blow could easily result in a concussion.

Barefoot swimmers are more likely to sustain an injury if their toe or foot becomes caught in a swinging door. Barefoot swimmers are much more likely to acquire wounds from rusty nails and / or glass fragments that may be lying around in the grounds surrounding the pool. Stubbed toes are common and quite painful, and are more prevalent in barefoot individuals. There have been cases of a parent or official / coach accidentally stepping on a child’s forefoot or toe area. Swimmers should wear some type of waterproof foot wear at the pool; such as flip flops or crocs.

Swimming officials may wear sandals, white crocs or sneakers. Wet sneakers over a prolonged period may result in toe skin maceration and fungal infections such as athlete’s foot. Wet socks and shoes also contribute to hypothermia, due to the large surface area. As we approach the long course season, remember to apply sunscreen lotion generously to your feet, if wearing open shoes. Just two hours of open sun on the feet may result in significant sunburn. Bad foot wounds, resulting from foot injuries or improperly fitting shoes, can lead to very painful ulcers or infections. Any foot cuts or scrapes in a diabetic swimmer, coach, or official take longer to heal, and may progress to a serious infection if not attended to promptly, even loss of lower limb is possible if person is a diabetic.

Officials and coaches should each invest in a pair of shoes with ample tread on the shoe sole. Having a second set of shoes at a swim meet is advisable as well as clean, dry socks. By changing shoes between sessions if working multiple sessions will better protect our feet. Slick soled shoes, although good for dancing, may pose a hazard on the slippery swim deck. Brisk walking on such shoes may result in skidding on the tile surrounding the pool with resultant falls.

So, do not permit “shoe wheelies” on the swim deck; encourage proper footwear for those individuals not swimming; and keep glass, hardware, and other sharp objects out of the pool venue. Most of us only have two feet ... and we need to keep these lower extremities in good shape for as long as possible.