

Lifeguarding at swim meets:

by Coach George Young 04/12/2012

Witnessing numerous close calls and actually seeing some emergencies action responds that have taken place during a swim meet, makes me wonder how safe pools are during a swim meet.

I know all public pools are prepared to handle emergencies procedures during normal pool use like swim lessons, recreational swim, lap swimming or swim team training. As pool's operational manual will outline the emergencies procedures of most if not all of the emergencies that may occur during a normal day at the pool. The concerns I have are the delay of reaction time, poor crowd control and lack of staff training in the area of swim meet safety needs to be improvement. From small pools to large pools with some the best trained staff in Southern California can experience swim meet safety issues. I asked five random pools two simple questions. 1. Does your training address "swim meet emergencies"? 2. Is there any suggestion, comments or procedures listed in the pool operational manual concerning safety during swim meets? For all five pools the answer to each question was NO!

Some very important concerns are:

- **Crowd control issues.** A swim meet the size of 275 swimmers during a single session meet may have 100-150 spectators. Will the walk ways be clear and easily assessable for staff to react to an emergency?
- **Noise factor.** Are whistles being used by the lifeguards during the swim meets. Whistles are used by the swim officials. Everyone using whistles either for starting procedures by the meet officials or by the pool staff may cause confusion.
- **Sharing Guidelines.** Pool administrators, pool staff, swim coaches, swimmers and swim meet spectators all need to be aware of safety guidelines. (SCS Swimming is doing a lot better on this by requiring emergencies action plans to

be issued to the head Ref. before the start of each meet. But the pool staff do not have to be involved with the emergencies action plan the SCS requires.

- Do the facility have enough staff on board during a swim meet to insure a safe environment.
- Is there good and easy readable signage at the pool during a swim meet to help educate both the swimmers and spectators on safety issues.
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A little over 25 years ago USA Swimming thought there was a need to establish a safer environment for the swimmers in the sport of swimming. USA Swimming and the American Red Cross worked hand in hand to design a class that would promote water safety. The class is called Safety training for swim coaches. The class has helped promote safety throughout the competitive swimming world. Carefully designed to enhance the safety of the athletes by helping the swim coach be aware of safety issues such as medical releases, hyperventilation alerts, general safe warm-ups outlines and even back boarding skills just to mention a few of the many topics taught in the course.

I believe it's time for the American Red Cross and USA Swimming to pair up again and look into forming a class related to safety at swim meets. USA Swimming has extended itself for swim coaches and it has been a plus for the sport. The American Red Cross has earmark class modules in both Water park and water front safety, both have been very helpful tool for facilities to follow the lead components of each class and promote a safer environment. Well, in my eyes it's time to help the facilities to establish a safe pool during swim meets and hopefully someday all the parties can work on making the pools safer during a swim meet. ♦