

Ground Breaking thoughts about water safety

Arranged by George Young 5/31/2017

More and more studies are being done on lifeguards. Not lifeguarding skills and lifeguarding procedures BUT what a lifeguard thinks, sees and reacts too. This is something that will hopefully lead to a better understanding on how agencies and aquatic management staff can help lifeguards and support them better.

I will highlight two of the latest studies that has been released:

The first one is by DR Tom Griffiths and Rachael Griffiths where they compare the relationships of lifeguarding and the bystander. Using theories from DR Phillip Zimbardo noted as "The Stanford prison experience" DR Tom Griffiths and Rachael Griffiths concluded lifeguards suffered from what is labeled as "*the Bystander Effect*" As the two explained what the bystander effect is, it becomes all so easy to understand how the bystander behavior can effect lifeguard behaviors. In 2010 & 2011 the Center for Disease Control (CDC) released two publications by Pelletier, A. Gilchrist establishing the fact that **78%** of the time a bystander notices a drowning victim before a lifeguard does.....This is so scary to read and glad the CDC shared the facts from their findings with the public and the number is **78% truly blows my mind apart!!!**

The other study that is still in the fact gathering stage is the pool audits by Mary Bella. She has been doing pool audits with the primary goal of documenting data on what a lifeguards sees and does not see. So how it works is a facility will let the patrons know there will be a training taking place during a designated pool hours. Right before the testing she would place in the pool many human like objects or props to look like a human's body on the bottom of the pool. After a lifeguard shift the lifeguard would be asked on how many human like objects were on the bottom of the pool. Right above each lifeguard station there would be a camera mounted and

then the number count by the lifeguard would be compared to the camera count. Each facility would have back up lifeguards guarding during the testing to insure a safer pool during the testing. The data being compiled can help and develop an understanding on a lifeguard is seeing or not seeing. With that information it may help facilities establish safer practices for scanning/searching the bottom of the pool and also help with zone coverage evaluations. From what I understand this auditing technique is not used to down grade lifeguards or lifeguarding skills BUT to enhance both the facilities and individual lifeguards on developing better safer practices. This is a fresh approach to audits. I am very excited to read the data and conclusions when the final report is publish.

Closing thought: Dr. Tom Griffiths has observed that lifeguards *do not want to get wet.....* He suggest that if a lifeguard was mandated to swim a bit right before his shift he would be more aggressive on his lifeguarding skills. Think about that....