



WATER ACTIVITY GUIDE



Generally, activities conducted in aquatic environments require a high degree of risk analysis and management. However, the level of risk will vary according to the nature of the activity. It is highly recommended that water activities be organised through external providers and venues which are accredited for such activities and provide fully qualified staff to ensure all safety precautions are adhered to.

The following information serves to provide a basic list of precautions that can be taken into consideration when planning water activities. It is not exhaustive and it is highly recommended that consultation be made with organisations such as the Surf Life Saving and the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia to receive specific information in planning a safe event.

The following websites, documents and information may also be helpful:

Websites:

<http://www.royallifesaving.com.au>
<http://www.sls.com.au/>

Safety Publications:

Lifeguarding Services Australia, Guidelines for Safe Aquatic Events:
<http://www.lifeguarding.com.au/Guidelines%20for%20safe%20aquatic%20events.pdf>

SLSS Policy Statement includes supervision ratios and a risk management model:
www.slsa.com.au/elements/FileDownload.aspx?id=289

Safety Planning for water activities must include:

PROCEDURES

In planning a swimming and water safety program, the ministry leader-in-charge must consider the:

- Risks relevant to the: environment:
 - Participants' capacity.
 - Activities to be conducted.
 - Capabilities of the supervisor/supervisory team.
 - Involvement of external providers.
- Required level of supervision.
- Supervision strategies.
- Means of identifying participants.
- Information to be provided to parents/guardians for their consent.
- Communication strategies.
- Emergency response planning.
- Briefing for participants.

ASSESS RISKS

The ministry leader-in-charge must conduct a risk analysis of the:

- Environment.
- Participants' capacity.
- Activities to be conducted.
- Skills of the supervisor/supervisory team.
- Involvement of external providers.

Potential dangers in aquatic environments may include immersion in deep water, impact injuries from dumping waves or from diving into shallow water, cuts and abrasions from rocks or snags, sunburn, hypothermia, marine stings and the presence of marine craft.

Supervisors should recognise that each aquatic environment is unique and that open-water environments are more hazardous than closed-water environments. The effects of current, wind, waves, tide and land formations are less predictable and more difficult to control, and should be continuously monitored.

ASSESS THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED

The full range of activities to be conducted during a swimming and water safety program is to be assessed and decisions made in relation to the selection of activities and areas to be used.

The ministry leader-in-charge should determine the additional skills required by participants to participate safely in activities such as:

- Diving or jumping from various heights.
- Swimming under water.
- Swimming in turbulent water.
- Catching waves.
- Entering and exiting the water.

Supervisors should be aware that activities involving the use of diving towers and springboards, interactive or floating play equipment presents a greater risk.

ASSESS THE EQUIPMENT TO BE USED

The ministry leader-in-charge must ensure that equipment to be used is checked to ensure that it is appropriate to the activity, safe and in working order.

Emergency rescue must be carefully considered along with the appropriate equipment such as surfboards, rescue tubes, wave skis, body boards or swim fins and a first aid kit (including a sleeping bag or thermo blanket).

ASSESS THE SKILLS OF THE SUPERVISOR/SUPERVISORY TEAM

The ministry leader-in-charge must ensure that there is a supervisor/supervisory team with appropriate experience, knowledge and skills to identify and manage potential risks at any stage during the swimming and water safety program.

Collectively, the supervisor/supervisory team must have the skills to:

- Identify and establish a safe activity environment.
- Effect a rescue and render emergency care.
- Monitor and respond to weather and environmental conditions before.
- During activities.
- Monitor and assess the physical well being of the participants.

At least one member of the supervisory team must hold a recognised qualification (refer below for detail or check with the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia).

Where an external provider or volunteers agree to perform tasks that require them to personally care for participants in the absence of a member of leadership team, the ministry leader-in-charge must consider the suitability of that adult/s for the task being assigned taking into account the:

- Appropriate screening including the requirement of a WWCC.
- Number of participants involved.
- Age, experience and capabilities of the participants.
- Activities to be undertaken.
- Characteristics of the venue.
- Health status, skills, and experience of the adult.

The role of supervisors must be determined and communicated appropriately.

QUALIFICATIONS

It is most important to have the appropriate number of qualified supervisors involved in any water activity. Supervisors who have earned the recognised qualifications are trained in a range of rescue methods and survival skills in preparation for challenging rescues of increased risk. They are trained to respond to resuscitation and emergency care casualties, survival and rescue skills and they are able to make the right survival decisions that may help others survive an aquatic emergency.

Recognised qualifications include:

- Level I, II or III Coach (relevant to the specific activity) under the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.
- RLSSA Bronze Medallion.
- SLSA Bronze Medallion.
- SLSA Surf Rescue Certificate.

- AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety Certificate (recognised as being appropriate for swimming pools only).
- RLSSA Swimming Instructors Certificate (recognised as being appropriate for swimming pools only).
- RLSSA Bronze Medallion (suitable for flowing river or waterway).

Recognised qualifications are specific to different aquatic environments. Advice should be sought from the relevant service providers. A CPR qualification is a component of most of the recognised qualifications. It may be acquired from St John Ambulance, Red Cross, RLSSA or other providers. Rescue and resuscitation qualifications from RLSSA and SLISA are current for 12 months.

ASSESS THE INVOLVEMENT OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

Where an external provider is engaged, the ministry leader-in-charge must be satisfied that the provider is competent and holds current and adequate qualifications. In addition, providers (and their staff), involved in activities with children and youth must have a current Working with Children Check.

The ministry leader-in-charge must inquire whether the selected external provider(s) has the appropriate level of public liability insurance as well as checking the church's insurance policy to ensure that the activity and arrangements made with external providers are covered. It is recommended that care must be taken not to sign indemnities, disclaimers or other documents provided by the agencies or companies which absolve them from liability for their own negligent acts or omissions.

ESTABLISH SUPERVISION STRATEGIES

Supervision strategies must ensure that the safety and well-being of participants is maintained at all times.

It is essential that participants in the water are actively supervised at all times. That is, the supervisory team has a clear view of all participants. The appropriate number of supervisors directly monitoring the participants in the water must be maintained at all times. Supervision strategies for participants not in the water must reflect the risks associated with the proximity of water.

System may be established to assist in supervision. One system is the 'Buddy check in system' – participants are paired, generally on the basis of similar ability. When a prearranged signal is given, buddies move together and remain in place. The supervisors confirm that each pair of buddies is safe and that each individual is looking out for his/her partner.

DEVELOP A MEANS OF IDENTIFYING PARTICIPANTS

Participants and supervisors must be easily identifiable. The ministry leader-in-charge is to decide on a suitable system(s) of identification for participants based on the assessment of the aquatic environment, participants' swimming and water safety skills, the type of activities to be undertaken, and the number of participants. Systems for identifying participants include:

- Wearing uniforms/brightly coloured or identifiable t-shirts/vests/bibs/caps/arm bands /rash t-shirts.
- Confining participants to designated areas not being utilised by others and having clearly marked out designated area.

PROVIDE INFORMATION AND SEEK CONSENT

Parent/guardian consent is required for water activities and other high-risk events. Information must be provided to parents/guardians to enable them to make informed decisions about their children's participation. Parents/guardians must be reminded to provide information about any changes to their children's health or fitness prior to the commencement of the swimming and water safety program.

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Planning for a water activity must include the development of a strategy that enables regular communication amongst all members of the group. The strategy must clearly identify a signal for gaining the full group's attention. An emergency signal must be selected and explained to all participants. The communication strategy must enable contact with on-site and off-site support services. An alternative mode of communication must be available in case of the failure of the primary communication method.

One example is the uniform system of whistle signals:

- One blast – stop, look and listen.
- Three long blasts – activity finished.
- Short blasts in succession and arms waved above head – emergency. Clear the water immediately and assemble in a safe area nominated by the supervisor.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING

The ministry leader-in-charge must develop or obtain a suitable response plan that will ensure access to emergency support without compromising the safety and welfare of the group or of a casualty. Consideration must be given to communication in the event that there is no mobile reception for mobile phones in remote areas or other areas where mobile reception is uncertain.

The ministry leader-in-charge is to ensure that emergency procedures, including emergency signals, are clearly understood by all participants and supervisors.

A nominated supervisor must have ready access to:

- A list of the names of participating participants and their parent/guardian contact.
- Telephone numbers.
- The Participant Health Forms and the relevant Health Care Authorisation Plans of those participants who are known to have particular health requirements.