

The Professional Lifeguard



LIFEGUARDING CAN BE A REWARDING JOB. BEING A LIFEGUARD IS—

- **Dynamic.** Each day on the job may present new situations.
- **Challenging.** Doing the job well requires quick judgments.
- **Important.** Responding to an emergency at any moment may be required.
- **Inspiring.** The knowledge, skills and attitude learned when becoming a lifeguard can save a life.

This chapter describes the characteristics and responsibilities of a lifeguard, the rewards of being a professional lifeguard and the importance of maintaining lifeguarding knowledge and skills.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSIONAL LIFEGUARD

Lifeguard professionalism begins with training and certification. Professional lifeguards are mentally, physically and emotionally prepared at all times to do their job (Fig 1-1). Professional lifeguards must be—

- **Knowledgeable and have appropriate skills.** Participate in training, including annual or preseason orientation and training, and regular and frequent in-service training to always be able to prevent and respond to emergencies.
- **Reliable.** Arrive to work on time, accept assignments willingly, be committed to the work and respond to all incidents quickly and effectively.
- **Mature.** Be a leader, act responsibly, obey all facility rules and lead others by example.
- **Courteous and consistent.** Be polite and enforce the rules firmly and equally for everyone.
- **Positive.** Show a positive attitude in all job activities.
- **Professional.** Look and be prepared to respond appropriately to any situation:
 - Wear the lifeguard uniform only when on duty.
 - Be well groomed.
 - Keep rescue equipment positioned for immediate use when on duty.
 - Keep essential personal gear, such as sunglasses, on or nearby at all times.
 - Sit or stand upright at the lifeguarding station.
 - Keep eyes focused on the assigned area of responsibility at all times.
 - Keep interactions with others brief and do not let them interrupt patron surveillance.
 - Transfer and handle equipment carefully.
 - Observe all facility rules, regulations and policies.
 - Eat and use mobile phones only when on break or off surveillance duty.



Fig. 1-1



Fig. 1-2

- **Healthy and fit.** To stay healthy and fit—
 - **Exercise.** An exercise program should include swimming and water exercises that focus on building endurance and developing strength (Fig 1-2). Regular exercise helps lifeguards—
 - Stay healthy.
 - Perform strenuous rescues.
 - Stay alert.
 - Cope with stress and fatigue.
 - **Eat and hydrate properly.** Good nutrition and a balanced diet help provide the energy needed to stay alert and active. Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.
 - **Rest adequately.** Proper rest and sleep during off-duty hours are essential for staying alert while on duty.
 - **Use sun protection.** Overexposure to the sun can cause many problems, such as—
 - Sunburn.
 - Skin cancer.
 - Dehydration.
 - Heat exhaustion.
 - Heat stroke.

These problems can be prevented by using a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, reapplying as needed, and by wearing light-colored, light-weight clothing, like a shirt and a hat that covers the head and shades the face, neck and ears. Using an umbrella provides shade. Wearing wrap-around polarized sunglasses with UVA/UVB protects eyes and reduces glare. Drinking plenty of water and taking breaks in cool or shaded areas throughout the day also helps prevent overexposure.

Dehydration and the Lifeguard

Lifeguards have the job of looking out for patrons, but sometimes forget about themselves. This sometimes is the case with dehydration. Dehydration is a condition that occurs when a person loses more fluids than he or she consumes. Knowing the signs of dehydration and understanding how it affects an individual's ability to remain alert can be helpful to a lifeguard. Some of the mild-to-moderate signs of dehydration include—

- Excessive thirst.
- Sleepiness or tiredness.
- Dry mouth.
- Decreased urine output—8 hours or more without urination for teenagers.
- Few or no tears when crying.
- Muscle weakness.
- Headache.
- Dizziness or light-headedness.

Some severe signs of dehydration include—

- Extreme thirst.
- Irritability and confusion in adults.
- Very dry mouth, skin and mucous membranes.
- Lack of sweating.

- Little or no urination—any urine that is produced will be dark yellow or amber.
- Sunken eyes.
- Shriveled and dry skin that lacks elasticity and does not bounce back when pinched into a fold.
- Low blood pressure.
- Rapid heart beat.
- Fever.
- In the most serious cases, delirium or unconsciousness.

Dehydration can be prevented by—

- Keeping properly hydrated by drinking water regularly and whenever becoming thirsty before, during and after a shift. A plastic water bottle filled with water should be kept at the lifeguard station.
- Eating well-balanced meals before a shift and during breaks.
- Taking breaks in cool or shaded areas.
- Avoiding beverages containing caffeine and/or sugar.
- Avoiding alcohol.

- **Do not use alcohol and other drugs.** On- or off-duty use of alcohol and other drugs can negatively affect job performance and can jeopardize the safety of patrons, co-workers and oneself.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PROFESSIONAL LIFEGUARD

The **primary responsibility** of a lifeguard is to ensure patron safety and protect lives—including his or her own. This can be done in several ways, such as—

- Preventing injuries by minimizing or eliminating hazardous situations or behaviors.

- Enforcing facility rules and regulations and educating patrons about them.
- Recognizing and responding quickly and effectively to all emergencies.
- Administering first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or using an automated external defibrillator (AED) in an emergency and, if trained, administering oxygen when needed.
- Informing other lifeguards, facility staff and management when more help or equipment is needed.

Other tasks for which a lifeguard is responsible are called **secondary responsibilities**. Secondary responsibilities must never prevent the lifeguard from meeting his or her

So, You Want to be a Lifeguard

Now that you have decided to accept the challenge of becoming a professional lifeguard, the American Red Cross can help. Red Cross Lifeguarding provides lifeguard candidates with the knowledge and skills they need to prevent and respond to aquatic emergencies.

The Red Cross Lifeguarding program offers four customized courses to choose from:

- **Lifeguarding** prepares lifeguard candidates to work at traditional pools and multi-attraction facilities.
- **Waterfront Lifeguarding** teaches lifeguard candidates surveillance and rescue skills specific to nonsurf, open-water environments, such as lakes and rivers.
- **Waterpark Lifeguarding** teaches lifeguard candidates surveillance and rescue skills specific to waterpark environments.
- **Shallow Water Attendant** trains candidates to work at water attractions up to 4 feet deep, such as zero-depth pools, catch basins at the foot of slides, winding rivers and kiddie pools.

For more information on Red Cross Lifeguarding courses, including course prerequisites and certification requirements, go to www.redcross.org.

Although the Red Cross does not offer training for the surf environment, our lifeguarding courses provide an excellent base for any type of lifeguarding. For information on becoming a lifeguard in the surf environment, visit the United States Lifesaving Association's Web site at: www.usla.org.



primary responsibility. Secondary responsibilities can include—

- Filling out required records and reports on schedule and submitting them to the proper person or office.
- Performing maintenance or other tasks assigned by his or her supervisor. (Some duties, such as monitoring pool water chemistry, require additional training beyond American Red Cross lifeguarding courses.)
- Inspecting the facility daily and reporting any unsafe conditions or equipment to a supervisor.

LIFEGUARDING TIP: Never perform secondary responsibilities when performing patron surveillance.

LIFEGUARD WORK SETTINGS

There are many opportunities in different environments in which to be a lifeguard. Lifeguarding is a challenging and rewarding experience. These environments include—

- **Swimming pools.** Swimming pools are enclosed bodies of treated water used for recreational or competitive swimming or other aquatic activities. Swimming pools can be rectangular in shape or free-form (**Fig 1-3**).



Fig. 1-3

Job Description for a Lifeguard

Job Title: Lifeguard (entry-level)

Job Description: Responsible for ensuring the safety of facility patrons by preventing and responding to emergencies.

Minimum Qualifications:

- Current certification in the following:
 - Lifeguarding:
 - American Red Cross Lifeguarding and First Aid
 - American Red Cross Shallow Water Attendant and First Aid (up to 4 feet)
 - American Red Cross Waterfront Lifeguarding and First Aid for nonsurf open-water positions
 - American Red Cross Waterpark Lifeguarding and First Aid for waterpark and multi-attraction facility positions
 - American Red Cross CPR/AED for the Professional Rescuer
 - Other certifications required by local or state laws
- Preemployment testing of lifeguarding knowledge and skills

Knowledge and Skills:

- Thorough knowledge and application of lifeguarding surveillance and rescue techniques

- An understanding of facility characteristics, rules, policies and procedures
- Leadership and public relations skills
- Decision-making skills

Responsibilities:

- Recognize and respond quickly and effectively in emergencies.
- Enforce all aquatic facility policies, rules and regulations.
- Inspect the facility on a daily schedule and report any unsafe conditions or equipment to the supervisor.
- Complete records and reports.
- Participate in regular in-service training sessions.
- Maintain fitness level (swimming skills, strength and endurance).
- Complete additional duties as assigned by supervisor.

Responsible to:

- Head lifeguard, lifeguard supervisor, pool manager or aquatics director/supervisor.

- **Multi-attraction aquatic facilities.** Multi-attraction aquatic facilities can include swimming pools, but also include play structures, inflatable play equipment, water slides and activity pools (**Fig 1-4**).
- **Waterfronts.** Waterfronts are open-water areas, such as lakes, rivers, ponds and oceans. This manual covers nonsurf, waterfront swimming areas, such as those at national and state parks, summer camps and campgrounds. Every waterfront is unique. They vary in water quality, clarity, currents and beach conditions (**Fig 1-5**).
- **Waterparks.** Waterparks are aquatic theme parks with attractions, such as wave pools, speed slides and winding rivers. Each waterpark is different and has its own unique attractions (**Fig 1-6**).



Fig. 1-4



Fig. 1-5



Fig. 1-6

Lifeguards learn the specific characteristics of their facility through orientation and in-service trainings. This manual does not discuss lifeguarding at surf environments where strong waves or strong currents are present. Surf lifeguarding requires other specialized skills and equipment.

DECISION MAKING

Decision making is an important component to lifeguarding. Lifeguards make many kinds of decisions, including—

- When and how to make a rescue.
 - When and how to perform first aid or CPR and give other emergency care.
 - How to work with their lifeguard team and the facility's management.
- How to interact with patrons and deal with them in a variety of settings and circumstances.
- Decision making can be difficult, especially in an emergency. The **FIND** decision-making model can be a useful tool to make informed decisions. This can help lifeguards to clearly understand what is involved in a decision. **FIND** means—
- **F** = Figure out the problem.
 - **I** = Identify possible solutions.
 - **N** = Name the pros and cons for each solution.
 - **D** = Decide which solution is best.
- The **FIND** decision-making model applied to lifeguarding decisions can help lifeguards find the best action to take in most situations.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

To avoid liability, it is important to understand the legal principles involved in being a professional lifeguard.

- **Duty to act.** While on the job, a lifeguard has a legal responsibility to act in an emergency.
- **Standard of care.** Lifeguards are expected to meet a minimum standard of care, which may be established in part by their training program and in part by state or local authorities. This standard requires lifeguards to—
 - Communicate proper information and warnings to help prevent injuries.
 - Recognize a victim in need of care.
 - Attempt to rescue a victim needing assistance.
 - Provide emergency care according to their level of training.
- **Negligence.** If a lifeguard fails to follow the standard of care or fails to act, which results in someone being injured or causes further harm to the victim, the lifeguard may be considered negligent. Negligence includes—
 - Failing to provide care.
 - Providing care beyond the scope of practice or level of training.
 - Providing inappropriate care.
 - Failing to control or stop any behaviors that could result in further harm or injury.
- **Good Samaritan laws.** The vast majority of states and the District of Columbia have Good Samaritan laws to protect people who willingly provide emergency care without accepting anything in return. These laws differ somewhat from state to state, but generally help protect people who act in good faith, within the scope of

Multi-Attraction Aquatic Facilities and Spray Parks

Multi-attraction aquatic facilities and spray parks continue to grow and increase in popularity. These provide a greater variety of activities for patrons.

Multi-Attraction Facilities

Many park and recreation departments, communities and private pool owners are adding play structures, inflatable play equipment, water slides and activity pools—sometimes replacing other equipment, such as diving boards. The idea is to turn a pool into a miniature waterpark. As new facilities are built, attractions are often part of the facility's design. Facility owners realize that people want to get the most entertainment for their money, so they provide more options for their customers.

Because of the variety of attractions in multi-attraction facilities, lifeguards need additional training on the use and care of this equipment and for the differences in surveillance that are needed to keep patrons safe.

Spray Parks

Spray parks are playgrounds, but with water. These parks create a unique interactive play experience for children who want to get wet without ever getting in a pool. They are becoming popular due to the fact that admission typically is free, and they provide children exciting play opportunities while at the same time providing a low-cost alternative to building a pool. Some communities do not have the budget to build pools, so spray parks are an attractive alternative since they do not have standing water and are computer controlled.

Some of the attractions that can be found in a spray park include spray cannons, ground sprays and above-ground features, such as forts, waterfalls, rain showers, animals that spray water and structures that simulate a car wash.

their training and are not negligent. Some Good Samaritan laws, however, do not provide coverage for individuals who have a duty to respond. For this reason, it is important that lifeguards consult a lawyer or the facility's legal counsel to determine the degree to which their state's Good Samaritan laws will help protect them.

- **Consent.** An injured or ill victim must give permission before responders can provide first aid and emergency care. To obtain consent—
 - State your name.
 - Tell the victim you are trained and what level of training you have.
 - Ask the victim if you may help.
 - Explain to the victim that you would like to assess him or her to find out what you think may be wrong.
 - Explain what you plan to do.

With this information, the victim can grant his or her informed consent for care. Someone who is unconscious, confused or seriously injured or ill (such as in a nonfatal submersion) may not be able to grant consent. In these cases, the law assumes the victim would give consent if he or she were able to do so. This is called *implied consent*. Implied consent also applies to a minor who needs emergency medical assistance and whose parent or guardian is not present.

- **Refusal of care.** Some injured or ill victims, even those who desperately need care, may refuse care. Parents may also refuse care for children. Even though the victim may be seriously injured, his or her wishes must be honored. However, a lifeguard should explain to the victim why he or she needs care and request the victim to at least allow someone more highly trained, such as emergency medical services

(EMS) personnel, to evaluate the situation. It must be made clear that care is neither being denied nor withheld, and the victim is not being abandoned. Someone else, such as another lifeguard, must witness the victim's refusal and document it. Any refusal of care must be documented.

- **Abandonment.** Once care is initiated, it must be continued until EMS personnel or someone with equal or greater training arrives and takes over. Responders can be held legally responsible for abandoning a person who requires ongoing care if they leave the scene or stop providing care.
- **Confidentiality.** While making a rescue or providing care, a lifeguard may learn something about the injured or ill victim, such as information about medical conditions, physical problems and medications taken. The victim's right to privacy is protected by keeping information learned about the victim confidential. Reporters, insurance investigators or attorneys may ask questions. This information must never be shared with anyone except EMS personnel directly associated with the victim's care, facility management or the facility's legal counsel. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 was created by the federal government to protect a victim's privacy. Sharing personal information with individuals not directly associated with a victim's medical care may constitute a breach in the victim's privacy. Further information on HIPAA is available at www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa.
- **Documentation.** Documenting injuries and incidents is very important. If a legal action occurs later, a record can provide legal documentation of what was seen, heard and done at the scene. Required forms should be completed as soon as possible after the incident occurs. As time passes, critical details may be forgotten. Reports should state facts of the incident, not opinion. Responders should sign, date and keep a copy of the report, even if care was provided when not on duty.

THE LIFEGUARD TEAM

A *lifeguard team* is formed when 2 or more lifeguards are on duty. Team members may be trained and evaluated together. Team members practice working together as a unit. Everyone who works at the facility needs to know and understand his or her role in an emergency and how and when to call for more help. To be a good team, all staff must practice the facility's emergency action plans (EAPs) together until everyone knows his or her responsi-

bilities and can perform them correctly. EAPs are the written procedures that guide the actions of lifeguards and other staff in emergencies.

Team members will work together better when they understand the expectations of management as well as what they can expect from each other. Management should put its expectations in an employee handbook or other written guidelines. To learn what team members should expect from one another, it is important that team members communicate and practice together. On-the-job or in-service training is ideal for reviewing and practicing EAPs and talking with teammates.

The lifeguard team is also part of a larger team—the aquatic safety team. The *aquatic safety team* is a network of people who prevent, prepare for, respond to and assist in an emergency at an aquatic facility. This team is comprised of other facility staff and local emergency service personnel. Chapter 4 discusses the responsibilities of the aquatic safety team.

HOW FACILITY MANAGEMENT PROMOTES LIFEGUARD PROFESSIONALISM

Facility management supports and helps lifeguards develop professionally by providing—

- A policies and procedures manual.
- Annual or preseason orientation and training and regular and frequent in-service training.
- Opportunities for recognition and career development.

If the facility does not have professional development opportunities, lifeguards should talk to their supervisors, who may be able to develop these opportunities or help find other options.

Policies and Procedures Manual

Management should be certain that all lifeguards have the information they need to work safely and to perform their duties effectively. A policies and procedures manual can provide this information. This manual usually includes—

- A mission statement.
- Administrative policies and procedures.
- Rules and regulations.
- EAPs.
- Opening and closing procedures.
- Sample record and report forms.
- Guidelines for daily pool activities and supervision needed for each (e.g., swim lessons, fitness classes and diving).

- Guidelines for special pool activities and supervision needed for each (e.g., large groups, day camps, parties and movies).
- Instructions for administering swim tests.
- Guidelines for personnel (including preemployment requirements, hiring policies, conditions of employment and standards of performance and conduct).
- An organizational chart (with a chain of command and job descriptions).
- A floor plan of the facility that shows emergency evacuation routes and where emergency equipment is located.
- Instructions for equipment use.
- Diagrams of areas of responsibility for patron surveillance.
- Rotations and assigned stations.

Orientation

An orientation session about facility operations and the lifeguards' responsibilities helps both new and returning lifeguards understand the facility, their responsibilities and management's expectations. Lifeguards should ask their employer questions about, and become completely familiar with, their facility's operations.

In-Service Training

In-service training helps lifeguards maintain their knowledge and skills at the appropriate level. The facility manager, lifeguard supervisor, a head lifeguard or an individual who is an expert in a particular subject matter, such as a public health official, risk manager or human resources representative, may conduct sessions (Fig 1-7). In-service training sessions might address issues such as—

- Potential hazards at the facility.
- Facility rules and regulations.

- EAPs.
- Surveillance and water rescue skills.
- First aid; CPR; AED; caring for head, neck or back injuries; and, when appropriate, bloodborne pathogens and administering emergency oxygen training.
- Personal protection equipment.
- Physical conditioning.
- Decision making.
- Internal staff issues, such as communication, teamwork and morale.
- Facility operations.
- Records and reports (proper documentation).
- Customer service.

LIFEGUARDING TIP: Professional lifeguards need to regularly participate in in-service training sessions.

Recognition and Career Development

Recognition for a job well done may come in the form of an award, a promotion or a written letter expressing appreciation for a lifeguard's efforts. Some facilities offer career opportunities through in-service training, special events like lifeguard competitions, additional training or course work or attendance at conferences or workshops. The Red Cross offers basic- and instructor-level courses to enhance careers in lifeguarding, such as Waterpark Lifeguarding, Waterfront Lifeguarding, Emergency Response, Administering Emergency Oxygen, Bloodborne Pathogens Training and Lifeguard Management.

MAINTAINING LIFEGUARDING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Earning a lifeguarding certification means a candidate has successfully completed course material and passed written and skill tests on a given date. ***It does not mean that the candidate has learned everything there is to know about lifeguarding.*** It is important that lifeguards maintain their professionalism by retaining their knowledge and skills at an appropriate level. Lifeguards should have annual certification training. This is especially important for seasonal lifeguards, who can lose knowledge and skills during the off-season. Annual certification training can include CPR and AED review courses, lifeguarding review courses and review of lifeguarding knowledge and skills. One of the best ways a lifeguard can keep his or her knowledge and skills current and stay in peak physical form is by participating in in-service training sessions.



Fig. 1-7

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Being a professional lifeguard means being fully prepared for this challenging and important work. Looking and acting professional indicates readiness to do the job. Staying professional requires practice and commitment. No one is a natural born lifeguard; it takes hard work. A lifeguard can meet the challenges and gain the rewards of being a professional through practice and dedication.