International Open Water Drowning Prevention Guidelines

Consensus based guidelines to prevent open water recreation drowning

May 2010
Many people drown while recreating at open water settings (lakes, rivers, oceans)
Background

• Drowning is a major cause of injury death for all ages. According to the WHO Global Burden of Disease estimates, 388 000 people died in 2004 as a result of drowning around the world, of whom 45% were under the age of 20 years.¹

• Global data show that approximately 28% of all unintentional injury deaths among children are due to drowning.²

• The drowning rate in low-income and middle-income countries is six times higher than in high-income countries (with rates of 7.8 per 100 000 and 1.2 per 100 000 respectively).¹

• The majority of drownings occur in open water.

Organizations around the world provide different drowning messages. A concise and consistent set of prevention messages is needed.

Initial work on developing drowning prevention guidelines began at workshops at two conferences and led to the formation of a Task Force of international experts in drowning prevention.
The 18 Member International Task Force

Co-Chairs:
L Quan (USA), University of Washington School of Medicine and Seattle Children's Hospital
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Members:
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Secretariat:
M Tansik (USA)
Developing the set of Guidelines

The Task Force addressed 5 questions:

- **What hazards** in the environment should I check for when I, my group, or my family goes to open water settings?

- **What rules** should I have for myself, my group or my family around open water?

- **What kind of supervision** should there be for children, teens and adults around open water?

- **What skills** should I or someone nearby have to protect myself or others around open water?

- **What technology aids** should I bring or make sure are available to aid drowning prevention in open water environments?
Methods

In a series of teleconference calls and emails over a period of 18 months, Task Force members:

- Created a list of guidelines which were placed into two groups: *Keep Yourself Safe* and *Keep Others Safe*.

- Prioritized the guidelines using a modified Delphi technique that consisted of two rounds of ranking the messages.

- Combined and approved the wording of the final messages.
  - All final messages received at least 80% approval by Task Force members.
1. Learn swimming and water safety survival skills.
2. Always swim with others.
3. Obey all safety signs and warning flags.
4. Never go in the water after drinking alcohol.
5. Know how and when to use a life jacket.
6. Swim in areas with lifeguards.
7. Know the water and weather conditions before getting in the water.
8. Always enter shallow and unknown water feet first.
Keep Yourself Safe

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Keep Yourself Safe

7. Know the water and weather conditions before getting in the water.
Keep Yourself Safe

8. Always enter shallow and unknown water feet first.
1. Help and encourage others, especially children, to learn swimming and water safety survival skills.
2. Swim in areas with lifeguards.
4. Always provide close and constant attention to children you are supervising in or near water.
5. Know how and when to use lifejackets, especially with children and weak swimmers.
6. Learn first aid and CPR.
7. Learn safe ways of rescuing others without putting yourself in danger.
8. Obey all safety signs and warning flags.
Keep Others Safe

1. Help and encourage others, especially children, to learn swimming and water safety survival skills.

Photo credit: Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB)
2. Swim in areas with lifeguards.
Keep Others Safe

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4. Always provide close and constant attention to children you are supervising in or near water.
Keep Others Safe

5. Know how and when to use life jackets, especially with children and weak swimmers.
6. Learn first aid and CPR.
Keep Others Safe

7. Learn safe ways of rescuing others without putting yourself in danger.
8. Obey all safety signs and warning flags.
Next steps

• Disseminate these guidelines to national and international organizations promoting water safety and to the general public

• Make the guidelines available in different languages

• Encourage organizations to adapt the guidelines to address their local open water settings and groups at risk for drowning
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