

Are Your Lifeguards in the Zone?

What do you think of when you hear the term *zone of protection*? Swimming areas should be divided into zones, with at least one lifeguard assigned to each zone. Be aware of a zone's boundaries for each lifeguard position. Zones usually overlap to provide additional coverage along boundary areas. However, many aquatics centers are single-lifeguard facilities conducting surveillance across the entire swimming area while on duty. Therefore, the lifeguard must scan the whole area, monitor swimmers in the water and on the pool deck, and recognize and respond to emergencies. Not an easy task.

Lifeguard positioning

Lifeguards should perform effective surveillance from several positions, including at ground level and from an elevated stand. Lifeguards should not remain stationary but may need to walk along the water's edge to ensure they understand what's going on in the entire coverage area. Elevated positions from a platform or stand give the broadest view of the zone. The higher the elevation, the less glare on the water as well.

SAFETY REMINDER:

WHEN WORKING FROM AN ELEVATED PLATFORM OR CHAIR YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO SAFELY EXIT THE STAND WHEN RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY OR DURING DUTY ROTATION. MAKE SURE TO PRACTICE THIS DURING IN-SERVICE TRAINING TO HELP PREVENT AN INJURY.

Lifeguards should know how to exit the stand safely when working from an elevated platform. Practice during in-service training helps prevent an injury when responding to an emergency or changing shifts. Also, beware that elevated platforms create surveillance blind spots near and directly in front of the stand. Don't overlook this area. Instead, scan under, directly around, and in front of the stand as part of the routine.

What to consider when identifying coverage zones

1. Where are the hot spots in the swimming area?
2. Is the safety line always in position?
3. Is the drop-off to the deep end identified?
4. Who is playing near the steps in the pool?
5. How are non-swimmers identified?

In aquatic centers with multiple lifeguards, each should be correctly positioned and know the protection zone they are responsible for monitoring. In addition, lifeguards should be able to easily recite their zone coverage responsibility when the information is clearly communicated to them.

In your open-water area with multiple zones, every part of the zone and its boundaries must be freely visible and readily accessible to the lifeguards. Posting a chart depicting each lifeguard's zone provides a way for lifeguards to review their area of responsibility. In addition, safety guidelines dictate that a lifeguard should visually scan their coverage area every 10 seconds. Increase lifeguard staff when needed, as when water becomes turbulent due to high waves, wind, or current. Or decrease the size of the zone area. If water turbulence becomes too dangerous, causing reduced visibility below the surface, all swimming should cease until the conditions return to normal.

The 10/20 protection rule

The American National Standard for Public Swimming Pools indicates that chair and zone stations must be positioned according to the 10/20 protection rule when a lifeguard is required. The 10/20 standard call for lifeguards to be suitably trained and positioned to identify an incident within 10 seconds and respond with proper lifesaving protocols within 20 seconds. Lifeguards must be diligent and not distracted by conversation, reading, or performing incidental tasks. Coverage should ensure that no lifeguard is more than 20 seconds away from reaching someone in the water. Duty schedules should be timed so that lifeguards can remain sufficiently alert. Shift changes should overlap to ensure there's no lapse in surveillance of the swim area.

Review this article regarding safe lifeguard rotation:

<https://www.thesilverlining.com/safety-tips/5-parts-of-a-safe-lifeguard-rotation>