

Aquatics/Pool Safety Laws:

**Federal:**

Virginia Graeme Baker Act: 15 U.S.C. §§ 8001-8007 (2008)

**State Laws:**

Arizona:

California: Wave Pool Safety Act – SB 107

Ohio

My name is Bryan Heckle, and I am a risk manager for the Redwoods Group. The Redwoods Group is a specialty commercial insurer for YMCAs and JCCs, and our mission demands that we work closely with our clients to change behaviors and to help them to make their communities better and safer places to live. To that end, we are committed to achieving the goal of zero drowning deaths in swimming pools and open water managed by YMCAs and JCCs.

Nationally, the YMCA is the largest single provider of aquatics facilities and services, and The Redwoods Group is the largest insurer of YMCAs in the country, with over 530 client associations in 49 states. Our aquatics exposure includes thousands of swimming facilities—primarily pools and lakes, but also water parks and oceanfront—and millions of swimmers.

I have been certified by Ellis and Associates. I am currently a certified Ellis and Associates lifeguard. With the Redwoods Group I make frequent visits to YMCAs, offer recommendations to change behaviors and work with YMCAs on best practices in aquatics and aquatic safety topics. I have also trained several thousands of YMCA

staff—lifeguards, camp counselors, management, and executives—on the risk of drowning and how to keep swimmers safe. I have also worked with YMCAs following near-drowning and drowning events that have occurred in our clients' water, I assist as an outside consultant in an on-site investigation of the incident within 24 hours and provide follow-up recommendations to improve their aquatics program and facilitate training to management and aquatic staff.

As I mentioned, we work closely with our clients. We share best practices, the latest techniques and science, and new technologies available to make their pools and lakes as safe as possible. But we don't run YMCAs or JCCs; the client ultimately makes the decision of what recommendations to implement or not. With one exception: to even be eligible for our program, a certified lifeguard must supervise all swimming areas when they are open. We believe so strongly in the importance of trained and certified lifeguards that it is a strict prerequisite for our insurance program. Here is why:

A drowning is silent and fast. Unlike what we have all seen on TV, a drowning victim does not yell for help, splash water, or wave their arms. They cannot. When the victim panics, lack of buoyancy keeps most of the body underwater. The victims try to do only one thing with their lungs—breathe, not yell. The involuntary responses physiologically when a swimmer gets into trouble actually force breath holding, so at best, the victim can't yell...at worst he can't breathe. In fact, a child that is drowning often looks just like another child playing in the water to the untrained eye. And the child will only remain on the surface for a matter of seconds before slipping below the surface. Water

hides, and it suffocates. This makes lifeguarding lakes and other natural bodies of water even more important, because once a victim goes below the water the chance that they will be seen is greatly diminished. A trained lifeguard who's responsibility is to scan the water for swimmers in distress will reduce the chance that a swimmer will go underwater undetected and will be able to initiate the park's emergency response immediately.

A drowning occurs very quickly, here is how a lifeguard can reduce the chance of this tragedy occurring:

- I. Supervision
  - a. Trained in scanning – properly trained lifeguards should be able to scan the water and should also be trained to identify a swimmer that is in distress
  - b. New technology requires supervision what does this mean?
- II. Rescue
  - a. Quick response – need extrication in < 3 minutes. Once a lifeguard identifies a swimmer that is in distress they should be able to get to them quickly and begin implementing the emergency action plan. Lifeguards should also be trained on victim search protocols should a swimmer go missing. Finding a victim quickly and beginning the emergency response immediately will reduce the chance that the victim will become a fatality in the water.
  - b. CPR trained – add AED/O2 – As part of the emergency response the lifeguard should be trained in handling an aquatic emergency scene, this

will include administering CPR and AED protocols as well as emergency Oxygen. This equipment should be available for lifeguards to begin using once a swimmer has been extricated from the water.

### III. Step in EAP

- a. Integral in activating EMS – The lifeguard will be the one to initiate the EAP and turning over care to EMS once they arrive. The lifeguard should be trained and prepared to provide emergency care to a victim until EMS arrives on the scene.
- b. Quick time to advanced care – Once a victim has been extricated from the water, and the emergency action plan is initiated, it is vital that the victim receive advanced care as quickly as possible, this gives the victim the best chance for recovery following submersion event.

By passing legislation that requires lifeguards at State Parks the State of Pennsylvania is taking a great step forward in the advancement of aquatic education and safety. Too many times parents and guardians don't give their children the supervision that the aquatic environment demands, placing them at unnecessary risk. By placing lifeguards at State Parks with appropriate rules and signage you can help to educate parents on the need for proper supervision in this environment while at the same time greatly reducing the chance that a patron of your Park System becomes a fatality statistic that could have been prevented.