

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

House of Representatives

Tourism and Recreation Development Committee

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The National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) is an incorporated non-profit organization with a membership consisting of the state park directors from the fifty states and Puerto Rico. NASPD is a professional organization with a mission of enhancing the understanding, awareness and appreciation of the state park systems throughout the United States through quality membership services, professional development opportunities, effective partnerships and advocacy. One way the organization accomplishes its mission is by surveying its membership to collect information on issues of concern to one or more states.

When the Pennsylvania House Tourism and Recreation Development Committee scheduled this meeting, John Norbeck, Director of the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks, requested a survey asking the NASPD membership how their states handled the lifeguard situation in state park swimming areas. This request resulted in a follow-up to a survey originally conducted August 18, 2004. To date forty states and Puerto Rico have responded to the Pennsylvania request with the following results:

States that provide guards at all swimming areas:	7
States that provide guards at some, but not all, areas: (a breakdown of these states is provided in Attachment A)	24
States that do not provide lifeguard service:	10

For the most part these statistics speak for themselves, but there are some interesting factors within the numbers among the states reporting a mix of lifeguard services. For example, most coastal beaches are guarded, but two states (Hawaii & Massachusetts) guard only the most heavily used sites. Indiana and Ohio guard only those beaches on Lake Michigan and Lake Erie, and they do not guard beaches on any inland bodies of water. Nevada and New Mexico guard only one swimming beach in their respective states. Those exception is made because of the high number of visitors and, in the case of Nevada, the extremely cold water in Lake Tahoe.

Most state park pools are guarded, but four states (Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Tennessee) distinguish between those pools that are open to the public and those that are available only to their campground or lodge guests. Two other states (Louisiana and Oregon) have pools in group camps but require the group renting the camp to provide

their own lifeguards. A number of states (California, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina and Rhode Island) encourage visitors to swim and play in guarded areas but don't prohibit open swimming. New Jersey is the only state that specifically stated that they monitor and enforce the no swimming policy at non-designated areas and during off-duty hours. Other states that provide lifeguards may prohibit swimming in unprotected areas, but they didn't specify that in their response.

The way individual states are dealing with the issue of providing life guards is a very mixed bag. In an ideal world state park systems would provide lifeguards at every swimming facility open to the public. However, there appear to be two primary impediments to implementing such a program. The first problem is that most states don't have the financial resources to support a full complement of lifeguards. That was true when NASPD first conducted this survey in 2004 and, with the current economic situation, it is still true today. Many states that have tried to provide lifeguards have found they can't compete with local governments and private clubs for the services of qualified guards due to an insufficient budget or state mandated pay scales.

A second major problem occurs when parks are able to hire a full compliment of life guards, only to see many of them leave in early to mid-August because the young men and women want to take some time off before returning to school or work. That problem is made worse by the fact that many colleges and universities now begin their fall semester around the middle of August.

A complicating factor that many state park systems experience is that many state parks are located in remote areas, and there aren't enough qualified guards available in the local community to fully staff all facilities. A number of states have reported working with the Red Cross to offer lifesaving certification courses to high school and college youngsters at no cost and still not being able to attract enough individuals to operate swimming beaches and pools in their parks on a reliable schedule. Several states also have reported that they had established training programs for new lifeguards only to see them leave for higher paying positions as soon as they obtained their certification.

Based on the different variations in the provision of lifeguard services reported, it is my belief that the most serious public safety issues occur when a park attempts to provide lifeguards for an area but can't maintain the service throughout the season - or even throughout the day. A very dangerous situation is created when a family comes to a park to camp or picnic and spends the afternoon swimming and playing on a guarded beach. Then, after eating their evening meal, the parents allow the children to return to the beach and the lifeguards are no longer on duty. Offering lifeguard services provides the parents a sense of security that often is not justified when lifeguards are on duty only part of the summer season or part of a day. This same situation can also occur when visitors utilize different parks within the same system and find that one park provides lifeguards and another does not. The public often expects a consistency from park to park within the same system that is not necessarily available.

In summary, there is no one standard practice related to the protection of state park swimming areas. Based on the results of the survey of forty-one state and territorial park systems around the country, fifty-nine percent (59 %) of the states responding provided lifeguards at some, but not all, swimming areas. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the respondents offered no lifeguard services at all, and only seventeen percent (17%) provided lifeguards at all of their swimming areas. Of the twenty-four states reporting a mix of guarded and unguarded areas, six provided lifeguard services at a single pool or beach. Over eighty-two percent of the respondents reported operating at least some of their swimming areas with no lifeguard services.

I hope this information is useful to you in your deliberations. If you have any questions, I would be happy to try to answer them.

Survey on Lifeguards

Summary of Mixed Responses

Beaches only:

Guard Saltwater and high use inland beaches:

Guard 6 of 76 beaches on Lake Erie only:

Guard one beach only:

Connecticut

Ohio

Nevada

New Mexico

Encourage swimming in guarded areas but don't prohibit open swimming:

California

Rhode Island

South Carolina

High use areas only:

Florida

Hawaii

Maine

Pools only:

Georgia

Kentucky

Louisiana

Mississippi

Oklahoma

Tennessee

Texas

Vermont

Day-use pools only (not lodges):

Arkansas

Pools and high use beaches only:

Maine

Massachusetts

North Carolina

Pools and Lake Michigan beaches only:

Indiana