

WATER RECREATION

Swim Area Guideline



NC DENR
Division of Parks and Recreation
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DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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STAFF DIRECTIVE 03-02

TO: District Superintendents
Park Superintendents
Safety Officers

FROM: Phil McKnelly, Director

SUBJECT: Water Recreation/Swim Area Guidelines

Effective immediately, the attached Water Recreation/Swim Area Guidelines should be added to the Employee and Workplace Safety Guidelines as Appendix V, which is referenced in Section 8.4.

Any questions or comments concerning these guidelines should be directed to Ron Bowling, Division Safety Officer, at 919-841-4065.

Attachment
PKM/RB/nta

WATER RECREATION / SWIM AREA GUIDELINE

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1.0 Director's Statement

The Division of Parks and Recreation is proud to be able to provide swimming facilities in many areas of our parks. While lifeguards are provided as a service to our visitors, each park providing this service must do so using an acceptable guideline. Our Division is committed to providing a quality lifeguard service to our park visitors whenever possible, but providing a reliable service often depends on park location and availability of qualified lifeguards.

Sincerely,

Philip K. McKnelly

2.0 Introduction

This guideline sets forth Division-wide policy and standards for the operation of lifeguard services and water recreation swim areas. The following standards and guideline supersede all previous directives and memoranda relating to the subject.

All park employees working with water safety in any way are responsible for adhering to and supporting the standards and guidelines set forth in this guideline. To deviate from or circumvent such responsibilities will threaten the effectiveness as well as public image of the Division's water safety program.

This document is meant as a guideline for the Division's parks and recreation areas to use in their water areas. Some of the guidelines will not be applicable to every park. The Park Superintendent needs to assess their park to find what is applicable to use in their setting. If the Park Superintendent feels that a section does not apply to their park, then they need to file an exception with the District Superintendent for approval.

3.0 Program Goals

- 3.1 Standard of Care: To provide sufficient protection of visitors to area of water recreation to meet both the Division's legal and self-imposed standards of care as applicable and reasonable for a specific park or recreation area.
- 3.2 Identification: To have Division of Parks and Recreation lifeguards easily identifiable and accessible.
- 3.3 Information: To provide water safety information and warnings to all park visitors.
- 3.4 Image Projection: To maintain a professional, qualified image.

4.0 Program Responsibilities

- 4.1 Director: Responsible for the development and administration of the Water Recreation Swim Area Guideline.
- 4.2 Superintendent of State Parks: Responsible for the management and supervision of the Water Recreation Swim Area Guideline and ensuring compliance throughout the Division.
- 4.3 Division Safety Officer/Division Safety Council: Recommends and/or reviews suggested changes to the Water Recreation Swim Area Guideline policy and standards.
- 4.4 District Superintendent: Will be responsible for the management and supervision of the Water Recreation Swim Area Guideline in his/her District.
- 4.5 Park Superintendent: Will be responsible for the management and supervision of the Water Recreation Swim Area Guideline in his/her park.
- 4.6 Ranger: Oversees the overall operations of their park area, which could include the hiring, training and supervising of lifeguards.
- 4.7 Lifeguards: Responsible for following all Division and park specific policies, guidelines and applicable standards.

5.0 Swim Area with Lifeguards

- 5.1 Each facility with lifeguard positions will maintain a sufficient number of lifeguards to provide service from 10:00 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. or the time set by the Park Superintendent to protect the designated areas by lifeguards.
- 5.2 Each facility with lifeguards must develop a Swim Area Operating Procedure Manual that will cover at a minimum the following items:
- Emergency Action Plan
 - Lifeguard Duties
 - In-service training
 - Lifeguard Rotations
 - Radio and Phone Policy
 - Maintenance and House Keeping
 - Chemical Safety and Usage (Pools)
 - Attendance and Supervision
- 5.3 If, due to sickness, vacation, or an inability to hire/train lifeguards, etc., and the minimum requirements cannot be met, the swimming areas may be operated as an ungraded (no lifeguard on duty) area and be treated the same as any other time when lifeguards service is not provided (See section 10).
- 5.4 Each swimming facility should have one lifeguard as Chief Lifeguard. A chain of command should be developed so that someone is always in charge at the swimming area. The lifeguard staff continues to report to the Ranger supervising the swimming area.
- 5.5 If the Ranger in charge of the waterfront area feels that the swim area cannot be run or is not safe due to staffing or other situations, then the ranger may close the area until such items or situations can be corrected.
- 5.6 Hiring and Training Recommendations
- 5.6.1 Chief Lifeguard
- 18 years of age or older (preferred not mandatory)
 - Valid Lifesaving Certification (Red Cross Lifeguard Training Certificate, YMCA, or Boy Scouts of America)
 - Current CPR for Professional Rescuer Certification or equivalent
 - Current Standard First Aid Certification or equivalent
 - Supply references attesting to applicant's maturity, judgement, reliability and character
 - Possesses supervisory skills
 - Pass Red Cross Lifeguard or equivalent test before hiring or at any time during the season if required by the park.

- One season previous experience as a lifeguard or 320 hours or 2 full months or most qualified.

5.6.2 Lifeguard

- 16 years of age or older
- Valid Lifesaving Certification (Red Cross Lifeguard Training Certificate, YMCA or Boy Scouts of America)
- Current CPR for Professional Rescuer Certification or equivalent
- Current Standard First Aid Certification or equivalent
- Supply references attesting to applicant's maturity, judgment, reliability and character
- Pass Red Cross Lifeguard or equivalent tests before hiring or at any time during the season if required by the park

5.7 In-service Training Requirements

Occasional in-water tests may be given by the chief lifeguard or supervising Park Ranger throughout the swimming season to ensure lifeguards can still perform to the level required to pass the Red Cross pretest and final skills test or equivalent. At a minimum, these tests should include the following. These tests shall be documented on a PR-63.

- Victim recognition
- Rescue practice
- Spinal injury emergency action plan
- Bleeding control (i.e., shark attack for coastal parks)
- Emergency notification procedures

5.8 Daily Requirements

- 5.8.1 A couple of steps should be taken to ensure each lifeguard stays at a constant state of alertness. First, lifeguards should be given a one (1) hour lunch without interruption. Additional breaks will depend on park operations and lifeguard availability. Also, lifeguards should periodically rotate to different observation stations, at least every 30 minutes at the swimming facility depending on the staff at that facility. This will prevent the lifeguard from becoming desensitized to the area, allow each lifeguard to have better knowledge of the entire swimming area, and the rotation can be used in conjunction with the break times allotted to each lifeguard.
- 5.8.2 The Chief Lifeguard, with approval of the Park Ranger supervising the waterfront, will set a schedule of work stations, breaks, and lunch hours for each lifeguard each day. This schedule should be posted so that park employees have access to this information.
- 5.8.3 All lifeguards shall be provided and wear attire. This will allow park visitors to easily identify lifeguards at a glance. Failure to bring and wear clean, proper attire is grounds for disciplinary action. Repeated violations can lead to dismissal from the position.

- 5.8.4 Lifeguards should be helpful to park visitors (i.e.: who for example may have questions about areas of the park or even questions about areas outside the park, location of restaurants, gas stations, etc.) However, a lifeguard's primary job is the protection of visitors in the water recreation areas. The lifeguard must not let anything interfere with his/her observation of the water areas. When possible, the lifeguard should answer questions as quickly (and politely) as possible while still watching the water. Detailed inquiries should be referred to park rangers or other personnel.
- 5.8.5 Lifeguards must maintain order and control of water recreation areas at all times. Visitor behavior that puts other visitors, park employees, or the visitor themselves at risk of injury, will not be tolerated. The supervising Park Ranger will provide specific instructions regarding how to handle such actions/problems.
- 5.8.6 Before or during the time a lifeguard is on duty, usage of any controlled substance not authorized by the lifeguard's physician is prohibited. Lifeguards using prescription drugs should consult their physician to determine if their duties of lifeguarding can be performed at peak level throughout the entire shift. Lifeguards will also be required to report any such use to the Ranger in charge of the swimming area.
- 5.8.7 For additional safety, the lifeguard must often use discretion in making decisions. Visitors and off-duty lifeguards should be discouraged from congregating in the immediate vicinity of the guard stands. Park staff and lifeguards shall monitor the weather channels for adverse weather conditions and evacuate the swim area at the first sign of severe weather. All swimmers should be removed from the protected area during an electrical storm and for at least 15 minutes after the last lightening is seen or thunder is heard, dependent on circumstances at that time. All facility rules should be promptly enforced either alone or with the help of other park employees. Water conditions at coastal parks should be watched for problems as well (i.e. high waves, rip currents, strong currents, etc.)

6.0 Swim Areas with no Lifeguards

Parks and recreation areas that do not provide lifeguard services will operate as an unprotected area. Swim areas with no lifeguards and swim areas with lifeguards shall operate in compliance with section 7.0 and section 10.0 of this guideline.

7.0 Lakefront/Riverfront Swimming Areas

All lakefront and riverfront swimming areas must be evaluated annually for public safety. This shall include but not be limited to:

- All swimming area must be inspected annually for debris and under water hazards. All under water hazards must be removed and inspection results documented on a PR-63.
- A maximum depth of 5 feet within the swimming area should be maintained where possible. Parks with a fixed swim line on a lake that has fluctuating water levels shall identify the water depth with appropriate signs or gauges. Parks with diving areas will operate in compliance with section 7.1 of this section.
- Swimming areas should have well marked and maintained boundaries ensuring that swimming areas are sufficiently separated from other water activities such as fishing, powerboating, jet skis and etc. This can be accomplished with a swim line that defines the swimming area, and perimeter buoys that establish a safety zone and warning that boats and other watercraft are prohibited.
- The swim area should have a readily accessible form of communication such as a telephone or emergency call box with information regarding emergency telephone numbers and procedures.

7.1 Parks with a deep water diving area within the swimming area must have a designated lifeguard on duty for that area (staff the lifeguard chair) if it is going to be used by park visitors in addition to lifeguards for the general swim area. Swimmers are required to perform a swim test for the lifeguard in charge before entering the diving area.

7.2 Where diving areas are provided, they must be far enough from shore to keep poor swimmers from being tempted to swim to the area. If the lifeguard has any doubt about a person's swimming ability, they can require a "swim test" of that person. That person, while still in the shallow water area must demonstrate the ability to swim a distance at least equal to the distance from the diving board to the shallow water area.

7.3 The minimum water depth for a diving area depends on the diving platform. A dock should have a 9' diving depth, a 1-meter diving platform/board should have a depth of 11'6", for each additional meter increase in height the depth should increase by 2'6". Swimmers using the diving area need a minimum of 30 square feet of space; therefore the diving area capacity should be controlled accordingly. The diving area depth area must be posted.

8.0 Oceanfront Swimming Areas

- 8.1 While lifeguard service is being provided, each facility will have on duty at all times a minimum of two lifeguards for every 100 yards of oceanfront.
- 8.2 For oceanfront swim areas the use of flags or warning signs will be required to let the visitors know the current swimming conditions at that time. These flags shall be posted in a prominent location. The United States Coast Guard system for identifying hazardous swimming conditions shall be used.

Green – Good conditions, no water advisories posted.

Yellow – Caution; riptides, high waves, high winds and water advisories posted.

Red – Beach area is closed due to dangerous life threatening conditions, hurricane, etc.

9.0 Swimming Pools

North Carolina Administrative Code 15A NCAC 18A.2500-Public Swimming Pools governs swimming pool operation and installation. Swimming pool maintenance and operating procedures are covered under section 18A.2537. A copy of this standard is attached as Appendix A.

10.0 Safety Equipment and Communications

10.1 Each water recreation area should have; based on the needs of your facility a combination of the following safety equipment.

- Rescue board and rescue buoys
- Rescue tubes
- One pair of binoculars (not required for pools)
- One megaphone
- First Aid Kit
- Two blankets
- Back board
- One whistle per guard
- Ability to communicate with other park staff
- Two personal floatation devices
- Throw jugs, life jackets and/or similar devices available at unprotected swim areas

10.2 Listed below is the whistle communication system to be used by all lifeguards for emergency and non-emergency situations.

- One Short Blast – when a lifeguard wants the attention of a swimmer
- One Long Blast – to clear the water (non-emergency)
- Two Short Blasts – when the guard wants the attention of another guard
- Two Long Blasts – Emergency!!!!

10.3 Each lifeguard should be trained in the use and maintenance of the safety equipment in his/her area.

10.4 When an emergency occurs outside the swim area, the lifeguards on duty, based on staffing, should to the best of their abilities provide help and assistance if needed. When leaving the swim area to carry out a water rescue outside the swim area, the lifeguard must notify the other lifeguards on duty of the emergency. The remaining lifeguards shall clear the swim area until the emergency is over and all lifeguards are back at their normal duty stations.

11.0 Sign Standard and Public Awareness

- 11.1 Every park that has a body of water must adequately inform visitors about rules, regulations, potential dangers, and general water safety. All signs should comply with Division standards in both wording and physical specifications. All notifications must be prominently displayed at sites that will cause visitors to see the signs and act accordingly.
- 11.2 Signs are occasionally damaged and require routine maintenance. When this occurs, the sign should be replaced or repaired as quickly as possible.
- 11.3 Information centers and educational displays should be used to inform and educate the public about water safety, water safety programs and park rules and regulations. Also, water safety programming should be part of the park's routine Interpretation and Educational Programming during the swimming season.
- 11.4 Below is a list of signs that may be applicable to park swimming areas and shall be placed at park entrances, information centers and/or swimming areas. Other applicable signs may be posted.
- **ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES PROHIBITED**
 - **SWIMMING PERMITTED IN DESIGNATED AREAS ONLY**
 - **SWIMMING OR WADING PROHIBITED**
 - **CAUTION: UNPROTECTED AREA NO LIFEGUARD ON DUTY**
CUIDADO: AREA SIN PROTECCION DE SALVAVIDAS
 - **LIFEGUARD ON DUTY (List times)**

12.0 Emergency Protection and Action Plan

12.1 What is an emergency?

Any sudden, generally unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances demanding immediate action from Park Ranger staff, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or Division personnel. Only trained staff should perform first aid. Any emergency begins when a staff member or responsible person recognizes that there is an emergency. Once a staff member becomes aware of the emergency, a number of decisions must be made quickly and with careful thought. With any emergency, call a Ranger and/or EMS for assistance immediately!

12.2 Emergency Contact List

Each park facility should establish and post emergency procedures with emergency phone numbers at all park visitor contact stations and swimming areas. These numbers should include but are not limited to: Park Office number, on-call Ranger, local EMS (911) and Park marti-system number. These procedures should include maps identifying the current position and locations of additional assistance pertaining to your park and community.

12.3 Location of First Aid Equipment

At all swimming areas there must be an accessible first aid kit and any other additional first aid equipment needed to provide emergency assistance. These items could be located within the service chase of a restroom, bath house or concession area. In addition, every permanent park employee should have a first responder bag in his/her park vehicle.

12.4 Swim Area Evacuation

Visitor safety and services is always of the highest priority and concern; therefore we must prepare for all potentially hazardous situations. There could be various types of emergencies that may require the swim area to be evacuated. Listed below are some examples:

- Swim Area Rescue and First Aid
- Non-swim area rescue
- Area Fire
- Utility Leak
- Lightning or Thunderstorm (park visitors should take refuge in buildings and/or personal vehicles).
- Other Disaster

Park staff and lifeguards shall monitor weather channels for weather alerts and evacuate the swim area at the first sign of severe weather. Procedures for clearing the swim area

upon notification of an emergency situation should be in compliance with section 10.2 of this guideline (Safety Equipment and Communications). This emergency evacuation should be conducted by the Lifeguards on duty or Ranger staff. Park visitors should be directed to a spectator area or bath house until the emergency is over and normal park operations can resume. Upon a major emergency or disaster, the public may be directed to exit the park.

- 12.5 The park staff should always follow the basic safety requirements when performing first aid. Only trained staff should perform first aid and should not provide assistance above their training levels. All lifeguards are required to be certified in CPR and First Aid, and rangers and maintenance staff personnel are either First Responder or EMT certified. The use of a breathing device should be used when performing rescue breathing or CPR. Always wear disposable latex gloves when performing first aid. Clean up and disposal of any blood/body fluids should be done in compliance with the Division Bloodborne Pathogens Plan, section 7.0; Housekeeping and Janitorial.
- 12.6 Any emergency involving serious injury or death may require notification services to the family and attract media coverage. During any major incident, it is common for the media (newspaper, television) and onlookers to arrive and ask a variety of questions. It is vital that all questions be referred to the Park Superintendent or Division Public Information Officer.