



ARC SAC Answers

Use of swim goggles while performing Lifeguarding skills

Scientific Advisory Council

Questions to be addressed:

Should swim goggles be allowed for participant use during American Red Cross Lifeguarding instructional courses?

Answer:

The answer depends on the type of activity being conducted in the lifeguarding course at the time. It is allowable to use swim goggles during the prerequisite 300 yard swim and during any aerobic conditioning swims similar to the 300 yard surface swim. Swim goggles should be prohibited from participant use during all other lifeguard skill activities including but not limited to the following:

1. When the participant is required to submerge below the surface of the water to any depth greater than 5 feet underwater.
2. When the participant will partake in any skills that may include any potential physical contact with another individual or object (backboard, rescue tube, diving brick, etc)
3. When the participant is making any type of rescue simulation.

Reasoning:

1. Swim goggles are designed for preventing water entry and irritation to the human eye and not as protection from a trauma to the eye.
2. In the British Medical Journal May 28, 1977 it stated "The Royal Lifesaving Society banned the use of swim goggles during their practical exams in the water and in initiative tests in competitions. This decision had been taken on the grounds that swimming goggles were not an item of first-aid equipment likely to be freely available to lifesavers at a drowning accident as well as because of possible injuries to the wearer."
3. [Dr. Frank Butler Jr. MD](#) has indicated that submerging to a depth of 5 feet or greater has the potential to cause barotraumas to the eye of an individual wearing swim goggles that cannot be pressure equalized.
4. Swim goggles present a greatly reduced surface area at the point of contact with tissue around the eye compared to the surface area of the swim goggle not in contact with the eye. The potential for serious eye injury is greatly increased by the swim goggle being contacted by an external object focusing the impact to the area around eye to a much smaller surface area.
5. Swim goggles are not part of any standard issue lifeguarding equipment protocol used in making a land or water rescue.

The bottom line:

Swim goggles should only be worn for the prerequisite 300 yard swim and any similar surface swimming activities during a lifeguarding course. Swim goggles should not be worn in any American Red Cross aquatic course where the participant may submerge to a depth of 5 feet or greater or participate in any type of activity that may potentially cause accidental or intentional impact to the swim goggle.

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