

Swimming



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Introduction

This is the third edition of the factsheet which updates that coded FS120620 dated June 1998.

Further editions will be published in the light of experience from this edition. The publication of future editions will be notified in Scouting Magazine, **Talking Points** and the Activities Newsletter.

The sections printed in italics below are extracted from the current edition of **Policy Organisation and Rules** (Rule 42.6).

A - Leisure centres and swimming pools with an attendant lifeguard

'When swimming takes place in leisure centres and swimming pools owned by other people or bodies, the leader must have read, accepted and implemented any safety rules and conditions contained in written operating procedures or displayed at the pool. The pool's lifeguard will be on duty to supervise all swimmers; the leader, however, is still responsible for the good behaviour of a Scout party.'

When an Association party makes use of a swimming facility owned or operated by another authority their rules must be of prime importance. This does not reduce the duty of care a leader has for the young people in the Scout party. As well as monitoring the behaviour of the party the leader should constantly be able to account for the members of the party.

B - All other facilities and locations

Responsible person

'All swimming must be under the control of a responsible person who will ensure that the appropriate safety cover and safety briefings are provided.'

Whenever swimming is organised as an activity for Members of the Movement it is essential that there is one person in overall control of the activity. It is not necessary that this person is a qualified Lifeguard or Lifesaver but that they are a competent manager. They must be aware of the potential dangers relating to swimming and to swimming at the specific location in use. They must arrange the necessary safety cover and liaise, as appropriate, with the operator of the location to be used. The responsible person must be prepared to stop an activity if and when required.

'The responsible person must:

- *Ensure that the location is suitable for swimming.*
- *Arrange safety cover appropriate to both the number of swimmers and the location.*
- *Brief the persons providing the safety cover on their duties.*

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- *Ensure that the necessary safety equipment is provided.*
- *Have read and accepted any written operating procedures relating to the location.*

Where appropriate, the responsible person must take into account:

- *The location and temperature of the water.*
- *The weather conditions.*
- *The age, ability and state of health of the swimmers.*
- *The suitability of the water with respect to depth, cleanliness, rocks and the movement of any tide, current or undertow'*

If it is intended to swim in a swimming pool the responsible person must check whether there is a written operating procedure, which must be read, accepted and implemented. In the absence of a written operating procedure the responsible person must carry out a risk assessment. Points to be considered are:

- Details of the pool, depth and safety notices.
- Potential risk factors.
- Maximum bather loads.
- Effect of any other users.
- Provision of safety equipment.

The responsible person, in conjunction with the safety cover, should decide the type and quantity of safety equipment appropriate to the location. The responsible person must ensure that the safety cover is competent to use the safety/rescue equipment.

Typical equipment that may be used in the swimming pool is:

- A long pole with a loop at one end, which can reach the middle of the pool. The person in trouble is then able to put an arm through the loop and be towed to the side.
- A safety line, preferably in the form of a soft buoyant aid (e.g. torpedo buoy). The picket(s) should be practised in throwing a line and should be able to reach the middle of the pool.
- Any other soft buoyant aid which can be thrown to a swimmer in trouble to assist floatation until the picket(s) can render direct assistance.

Supervision

Sole use of a facility or location

'When a single Colony, Pack, Troop or Unit has sole use of a facility or location the responsible person must meet the requirements of any operating procedure and carry out a risk assessment for the location and activity. They must arrange for safety cover to be provided:

- *by a person(s) with a knowledge of water safety. This person need not be formally qualified but must be, familiar with the safety equipment provided, be suitably equipped and dressed, and have the ability to take effective emergency action. The person must not be in the water. The primary tasks are to oversee the activity and in an emergency carry out effective rescue and resuscitation.*

- *in the following numbers:*
 - * *if the party size is less than or equal to 7 - one person;*
 - * *greater than 7 but less than or equal to 20 - two persons;*
 - * *for every additional 20 swimmers - one additional person.'*

Multiple use of a facility or location

'When more than one Colony, Pack, Troop or Unit is using the same facility or location there must be one responsible person in overall control This person must meet the requirements of any written procedure and carry out a risk assessment for the location and activity. They must arrange safety cover.

- *as detailed above.*
- *and ensure that at least one of the persons providing the cover holds a valid Royal Life Saving Society UK National Lifeguard qualification appropriate to the location or a Swimming Teachers Association National Aquatic Rescue Standard for Lifeguards in Swimming Pools or equivalent.'*

It must be stressed that this is the minimum level of supervision required to undertake swimming as a Scout Association activity. The responsible person must pay attention to any written operating procedures and carry out a risk assessment in respect of the facility or location.

Extra safety cover may be required when swimming is undertaken by young or weak

swimmers. When swimming in open water extra supervision in the form of a safety boat crew may be required. The helm, for instance, cannot be the safety cover.

When more than one Scout Colony, Pack, Troop or Unit are using the same facility or location there is an increased chance of confusion and the breakdown of communications. In these circumstances it is essential that there is only one responsible person in charge who must ensure that the appropriate safety and management cover is in place. In these circumstances it is essential that an increased level of safety cover is provided. At least one of the people providing the safety cover must hold a Lifeguard Qualification appropriate to the location.

- **For a swimming pool:**

- * Royal Lifesaving Society UK Pool Lifeguard Award;
- * Swimming Teachers Association National Aquatic Rescue Award.

- **For a river or lake:**

- * Royal Lifesaving Society UK Open Water Lifeguard Award;
- * British Canoe Union Canoe Lifeguard Award.

- **For a beach:**

- * Royal Lifesaving Society UK Beach Lifeguard Award;
- * British Surf Lifesaving Society Lifeguard Award;

* British Canoe Union Canoe Lifeguard Award.

In addition the level of supervision in any changing facilities will be governed by the age of the young people taking part.

The safety cover

The safety cover will need to be active people who are strong swimmers with a knowledge of life saving techniques both from the side and in the water. In the case of an incident their first priority should be to assess whether rescue can be effected from the side, they must also be capable of recovering a casualty from deep water. They should assist the responsible person in the risk assessment of the facility or location and give advice on the level of safety equipment required and the best places for the safety cover to be located. They will need to be practised in the use of the safety equipment provided and be capable of carrying out the current recommended cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques. The safety cover must be dressed to take any necessary emergency action without delay. While on duty as safety cover they must only enter the water to respond to an emergency.

The safety cover takes responsibility for assisting any swimmer in trouble. In the event of an incident their responsibility is to the swimmer in trouble and not the rest of the group. The responsible person supervises the evacuation of the other swimmers and any necessary headcount.

In the case of swimming at an open water location consideration should be taken of the most suitable place for the safety cover. This could be on the bank, at a bank on a down stream location, in a safety boat or using a dedicated rescue canoe. The safety cover or lifeguard must be aware of the depth of the water so that they can accurately gauge whether it is possible to render assistance

by wading rather than swimming. Physical aids such as soft buoyant aids must be available and the picket or lifeguard must be practised in their use.

When the use of a safety boat or rescue canoe is considered the best option for the safety cover there will be other factors to consider. Is the helm of the rescue boat authorised for the craft and the class of water? The helm will have enough to do controlling the craft and must not be included in the team of safety cover and watchers. When a rescue canoe is used the safety cover in the canoe(s) will need to be trained to a degree where the control of the canoe is second nature so that no time is lost in the event of an emergency. The safety cover will need to be authorised for the craft and the water and the holding of a BCU Lifeguard qualification should be considered.

Swimming from a beach where there is no local safety patrol is potentially the most dangerous and in these circumstances it is recommended that one of the safety cover has at least an RLSS UK Beach or Open Water Lifeguard qualification.

Care must be taken in the deployment of any safety cover. Current best practice is that such a person should be on duty for a maximum period of 45 minutes in any one spell, with a break of at least the same length of time between duty spells.

Open water swimming

There will be many occasions when a Scout party goes swimming in a river, lake or the sea. When considering the suitability of the water the following points should be considered:

- Local advice on tide, rip currents, undertows or outfalls, waterfalls, locks, sluices and other factors which can create rapid water level changes.

- Definition of swimming area, a simple buoy system etc.
- Effect of any other water users in the area, anglers, power boats etc.
- Provision of safety equipment.

Having settled on the location and researched the suitability, the responsible person will need to arrange the appropriate safety cover, watcher(s) and equipment.

The limits of the swimming area must be clearly defined. A simple buoy system will be adequate in a lake or slow moving river but extra markers will be needed where there is a significant current. In the case of the sea, it is better to use areas already set aside for swimmers than to try to arrange specific limits for a 'Scout' party.

Except in very unusual conditions, all open water will be considerably colder than that experienced in a swimming pool. Indeed, in coastal waters the temperature never rises above the level required to prevent the onset of hypothermia. There is, therefore, a reduction in the unprotected swimmer's ability which may cause unexpected difficulties very quickly or close to safety. This is particularly likely to occur in late spring and early summer.

The low water temperature can also be a problem in upland lakes and lochs which have been fed by melting snow. They will often remain very cold all year round.

The weather can be a particular problem in coastal waters where strong winds may set up surface currents that will need to be taken into account. Strong winds can also cause breakers that are dangerous to swimmers. There are two

types of breaking wave which should be avoided. The Dumping Wave often occurs on steeply shelving beaches. The waves break with great force and can throw swimmers to the bottom causing injuries. The Surging Wave may never actually break and also occurs on steeply shelving beaches. There will be an unexpected build up of water which can knock swimmers feet from under them or pluck inattentive people from the shore line.

In inland waters poor weather conditions, wind or rain may cause body cooling prior to the entry to the water aggravating the cooling effect of the river or lake.

The age and ability of swimmers in open water swimming is important. Young swimmers may be more vulnerable to currents and tides and may need extra supervision. Weak swimmers in a swimming pool will be weaker in cold water and should be restricted to close inshore and subject to specific supervision. It is noticeable that nationally a higher proportion of those drowning suffer from a pre-existing medical condition. The person responsible should make sure that they are aware of any such condition and adjust the supervision as appropriate.

It is generally safe to say that if water looks clean it is probably safe to use for swimming. If there is a lot of floating debris, scum and weed, questions should be asked locally about the suitability. If the water is very deep, the surface layer may warm up leaving very cold water not far below the surface. In summer this effect can be very marked as the absence of strong winds can mean that there is practically no mixing of the warm upper layers and the cold lower layers. Such a combination can cause severe problems. The responsible person and the safety cover will need to be particularly briefed on such conditions. The condition of the floor of the river, lake or beach, should also be researched. Are there any known

obstructions which should be avoided or taken into account?

On the beach, consideration will have to be taken regarding the possibility of meeting currents or tides that may cause problems. Rip Currents are a particular danger that may pose a risk of drowning. Where they occur they often run out faster than swimmers can swim against. They are typically identified by; discoloured water due to sand being stirred up; foam on the surface extending out from the beach; debris floating seaward; a rippled appearance where the water around is calm; waves breaking further out on both sides of the rip. The existence of Long Shore Drift may cause swimmers to be pulled out of the briefed swimming areas and should be watched for. Estuaries can be particularly dangerous where combinations of current and tide can easily catch the unwary swimmer.

Briefing the swimmers

'The responsible person must brief the swimmers on the following points:

- *Any matters specific to the location, e.g. limits to the area in use, other water users and hazards.*
- *Demonstrate the emergency signal to be used to tell all swimmers to leave the water.*
- *Swimmers must swim together in pre-arranged groups of two or three and if one of them gets into difficulties the other(s) must raise the alarm.'*

Before the swimmers enter the water the responsible person will brief the swimmers on all safety matters relating to the facility or location. It is essential that all swimmers are aware of any

limits that have to be observed, any potential hazards associated with other water users and any hazards identified as a result of taking local advice.

It is essential that, if a problem occurs, those swimmers not involved leave the water immediately. In order to ensure that this happens an emergency signal is needed. This must not be capable of misunderstanding. For instance, if swimming in an outdoor pool and there is an activity nearby using whistles, a whistle would not be a suitable emergency signal. Consideration should be given to alternatives such as an air horn. Where there may be people involved with hearing difficulties there may be a need for a back up visual signal to denote the clearance of the area. The emergency signal used should be demonstrated before the swimmers enter the water.

The buddy system of swimming where small groups of swimmers (two or three) stay together in pre-arranged groups ensures that any potential problem is identified at the earliest possible opportunity. Swimmers must be put into their pre-arranged groups before anyone enters the water. The person responsible should withdraw the swimmers from the water if it becomes clear that the individuals in a group are separating.

C - Swimming training or competition

'Training in swimming and swimming competitions should be carried out to the standards of the Amateur Swimming Association or the Swimming Teachers Association.'

In a normal swimming training or competitive session there will be less need for the safety cover as the party will be in a more ordered situation. The person responsible for arranging the swimming/training session should be aware of the swimmers taking part and monitor their entry

and exit from the water. Care should be taken to ensure that no member of the party slips back into the water at the end of the session. The Rescue Test for Teachers and Coaches of Swimming as recommended by the RLSS UK, the Amateur Swimming Association and the Swimming Teachers Association should be used when selecting the number of instructors and the management of the party in the water.

D - Scout owned swimming facilities

Management Committees of Scout property with a swimming pool must operate the facility in accordance with the guidance contained within the publication 'Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools' [HSE Books, HSG179]. They must have carried out a risk assessment, produced a written operating procedure and arranged for an attendant lifeguard to be on duty during every session. Scout parties using such a facility should do so in accordance with Rule 42.6(a). Further information and advice is given in the factsheet Scout Association Swimming Pools available from the Scout Information Centre.

Publications cross reference

Current Editions of:

Policy, Organisation and Rules of The Scout Association (

Scout Association Swimming Pools -

FS120621.

Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools (HSE Books, HSG179)

Safety on British Beaches (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents/RLSS UK)

- 0 907082 95 5.

Safe Supervision (ASA/ISTC/ISLM/RLSS UK) - ISBN 900 738 20 1.