

Background on the Safety Training for Remote Aquatic Environments (STRAE) Committee

In the fall of 2000, Brent Bell and Preston B. Cline began discussing the “swimming problem” that many outdoor education programs face. Put simply, there is currently no nationally recognized life guarding course that trains people how to lifeguard in remote environments without the assistance of a rescue tube. At the same time there are numerous programs throughout the U.S. who allow their participants to swim, dip or wade in remote environments. The lack of training guidelines for remote aquatic environments is a problem that many professionals recognize.

During one of their discussions on the subject Brent Bell proposed that if Preston could get a group of relevant stakeholders together, Harvard would host the meeting. From the beginning it was a challenge to find people who could represent the industry and were willing to secure the funds to travel to Boston to take part in the meeting. Some financial support was provided by Adventure Incorporated, Harvard’s First-year Outdoor Program, and the Northeast Region of the Association of Experiential Education, but travel expenses were largely left to individuals or specific organizations.

Many organizations and representatives were invited but unable to arrange to attend. Some organizations, such as NOLS sent a written statement outlining their position on the issue and wishing the committee luck on its proceedings. Numerous outdoor programs were gracious and understanding, allowing one of their colleagues to represent their interests and helping to keep the initial meeting at a manageable size.

At the conclusion of the meeting the group issued a position statement and recommendations for creating guidelines. It is hoped that at some future date that the Association For Experiential Education or the American Camping Association will issue a statement to help guide organizations that face this challenge.

Committee on Safety Training for Remote Aquatic Environments

Position Statement

Outdoor leaders, and people in their care, are often exposed to remote aquatic environments¹ that present unique hazards and perils. Fatalities and injuries occur as a result.

There is a lack of broadly accepted guidelines for prevention of and response to drowning, near drowning, and other injuries in remote aquatic environments. The development of guidelines could be expected to enhance the outdoor experience, to raise awareness of the risks, and to reduce the incidence of injury and death.

The guidelines should include appropriate practices and training recommendations that balance safety, practicality, and effective use of resources. They should address a wide range of groups, environments, and activities.

These guidelines should be developed through a process that involves input from recognized aquatic safety organizations, industry associations, and organizations leading trips in remote environments. The process should invite feedback and seek consensus.

The purpose of developing these guidelines is to assist organizations in improving their training and practices regarding water safety in remote environments.

Signed April 24, 2001, Cambridge, MA

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¹ Remote Aquatic Environment – Any aquatic environment that is not a designated, appropriately lifeguarded swimming area or waterfront facility where the risk of drowning, near drowning, injury or other loss is possible. Attributes of remote aquatic environments include, but are not limited to, environments where rescue equipment is not available or must be improvised.

Recommended Elements of the Guidelines

The following are elements that should be addressed in establishing guidelines.

Administration Guidelines

Leaders:

- ◆ Minimum requirements for number of rescue-trained leaders for each group
- ◆ Minimum age for leaders
- ◆ Minimum verified skills for rescuers (including minimum swimming skills)
- ◆ Pre-requisites skills prior to training
- ◆ Training outcomes for leaders - minimum required knowledge and skills
- ◆ Minimum level of CPR training
- ◆ Required Pre-season Training
- ◆ Required In-Service Training
- ◆ Health & Fitness Standards
- ◆ Essential function capabilities of a leader
- ◆ Minimum number of hours for training of leaders
- ◆ Minimum level of first aid training

Participants:

- ◆ Medical Screening
- ◆ Aquatic skills assessment
- ◆ Informed Consent (from parent or guardian if a minor)

Equipment Guidelines

- ◆ The kinds of rescue equipment people would be readily able to carry with them (such as a throw bag)
- ◆ The kinds of equipment people carry with them for other purposes that they could improvise to use for rescue purposes in an emergency
- ◆ What equipment is required under what circumstances
- ◆ Training that compensates for lack of equipment
- ◆ Improvised equipment principles

Training Guidelines

- ◆ Environmental assessment
 - The types of aquatic situations and hazards that trips are likely to encounter
- ◆ General:
 - Screening and skills development
 - Prevention (training for both leaders and participants)
 - Group Assessment
 - Preparation - Management of Aquatic activities, to include. But not necessarily limited to:
 - Boundaries
 - (Lifeguard) positioning
 - Supervision
 - Rescues
 - Personal Safety of Rescuer
 - Search and Recovery
 - Spinal injury assessment
- ◆ Site specific:

- Situation Assessment (site-by-site)