

Flat Water Lifeguarding

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There are many differences between flat water lifeguarding and surf lifeguarding. The most obvious differences would be the environmental hazards that are present. Due to the static nature of flat water, parents and swimmers may not recognize the existing dangers. Therefore, scanning techniques must be quicker and more attentive to cover usually very congested swim areas. The occasional presence of man-made objects such as platforms, boogie boards, water wings, etc. entices swimmers to go beyond their ability.

The flat-water environment lacks aquatic hazards such as piers, rips and surf. Designated flat-water swim areas generally decline to a smooth drop-off with no signs of danger. These swim areas are usually congested with families not willing to venture to the ocean, with most young swimmers lacking strong aquatic skills. This entices poor swimmers to push past their limits. A potential victim can slip off a floatation device leaving them in danger very quickly. Still water lacks the environmental cues that regularly trouble swimmers in the ocean.

Some of the more common places to spot rescues are around man-made platforms and lane lines. Swimmers are often lured to these objects not realizing how far away they are and how deep the water is. Aside from the classic signs of a rescue, the lifeguard looks for victims anxiously looking back and forth from shore to the platform trying to judge which is closer, and victims rolling onto their back to rest. Also, parents often swim with their children out to the platforms. Then they realize halfway there that they are too tired, and need to get the child off of them. This can result in a possible double rescue for lifeguards.

The next common area for rescues involves the inshore shallow water. With small children having large heads and small arms, they can easily lose their balance and fall over. Without the ability to push themselves back up, they need assistance quickly. Other rescues involve non-swimmers that are lured to deeper water by a Frisbee, ball, or even a duck, ending up where they cannot touch the bottom. The lifeguard cannot rely on parents to notice their children in trouble, as many rescues occur within arms reach of the parents. In addition to watching swimmers, the lifeguard must watch for boats, which commonly endanger swimmers when they intrude into the swimming areas.

With all of these circumstances, rescues evolve quickly, so the lifeguard must have a high level of concentration. For guarding flat-water environments, one good recommendation is rotation to a new vantage point every thirty minutes. All types of lifeguarding require great attention to the water and each has its own different and challenging aspects.

