



Lifeguard Surveillance and Implementation of the Buddy System at the Waterfront

2019 Westchester County
Camp Workshop Webinar

Westchester
gov.com

George Latimer, County Executive
Sherlita Amler, MD, Commissioner
Department of Health

Outline

- Definition of Drowning and Non-Fatal Drowning
- Drowning Statistics
- Common Causes of Drownings and Non-Fatal Drownings
- Swimming Assessment
- Review of the Buddy System and Board System
- Layers of Protection
- Lifeguard Surveillance
- Break Down in the Buddy System
- Examples of Violations
- Questions

Non-Fatal Drowning & Drowning

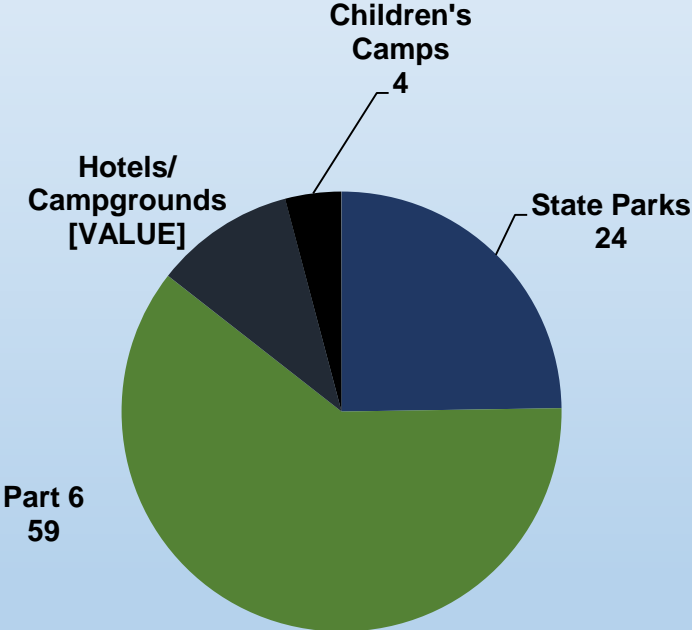
- Drowning is defined as death by asphyxia due to submersion in water or another fluid. Drowning begins when a person loses consciousness.
- Non-fatal drowning is the survival after suffocation caused by submersion in water or another fluid.
- Both incidents must be reported within 24 hours.

The Statistics

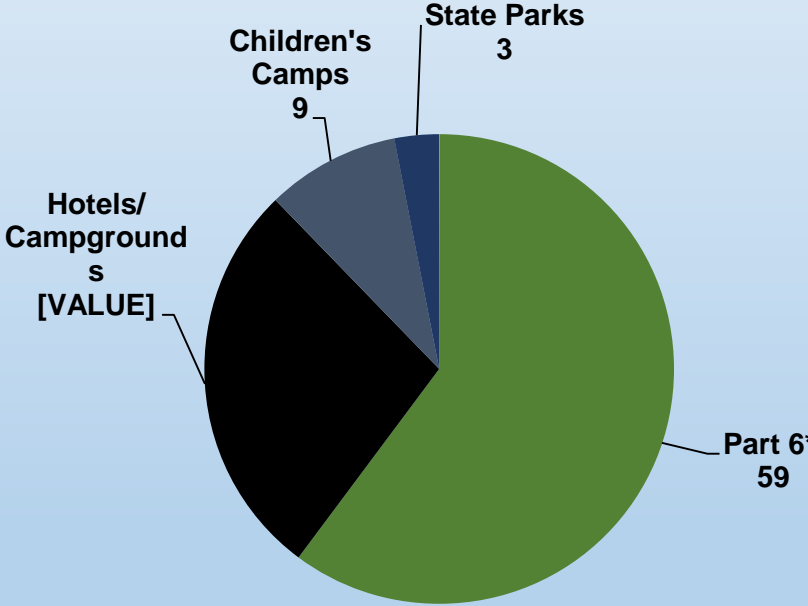
- The CDC reports from 2005-2014, there was an average of 3,536 fatal unintentional drownings in the United States.
 - Approximately 10 deaths per day.
- In NYS alone, hundreds of people drown or are hospitalized for severe injuries that occur while underwater.
- NYS Department of Health studies show that children below age 5 and teenagers have the highest rate of drowning.
 - At public beaches and pools, most drowning victims are between 11 and 25 years of age.
- Between 1987-2010 Westchester County had 13 drownings occur at regulated swimming pools and beaches.

Fatal Drownings at NYS Bathing Facilities 1987 - 2014

Beaches N = 97



Pools N = 98



* Includes: 7 Spas, 5 Phys Ed Classes, 1 Wave Pool, 1 Aquatic Theme Park

Common Causes of Drownings/Non-Fatal Drownings

- Leaving children unattended near bodies of water.
- Concussion, seizure or heart attack while in the water.
- Panic in the water.
- Inability to swim.

Swimming Assessment

- **Adequately** swim testing campers to determine their swimming ability is extremely important!
- Swim assessment criteria is not specified in Subpart 7-2, but **MUST** be specified in the camp's safety plan.
- Swim assessments must be conducted each camp season, prior to swimming (this includes going on trips involving swimming or aquatic theme attractions).
 - Camper's swimming abilities may change from year to year due to injuries and/or changes in fitness or physical abilities.
- Assessment should be appropriate for the type of facility (i.e. pool, lake).

Swimming Assessment

- Recommended, at minimum, to include the following:
- **Component One (administered in water less than chest deep of the camper)**
 - Feet first entry into chest deep water
 - Swim front crawl for 25 yards
 - Swim elementary backstroke for 15 yards
 - Shows the ability to follow the instructions

Swimming Assessment

- **Component two (administered in water greater than chest deep only after component one is successfully completed).**
 - Maintain position on back 1 minute
 - Tread water for 1 minute
 - Swim breaststroke for 15 yards
 - Swim back crawl for 25 yards
 - Do a complete circle (ensures swimmer can orient themselves to the side of the pool)

Review of the Buddy System and Board System

- A system which encompasses supervising and checking bathers and includes:
 - An accounting system which identifies each bather by name, the bather's swimming ability and the swim area to which the bather is assigned.
 - Method to record the entry to and exit from the swim area for each bather.
 - Assigning each bather to a buddy who has the same level of swimming ability.
 - If a non-swimmer must be paired with a swimmer, both must remain in the non-swimmer area.
 - Buddy checks are made at least every 15 minutes and checks are referenced against the accounting system (i.e. buddy board, sheet, etc.).

Three Layers of Protection at the Waterfront

1. Buddy
 2. Camp Staff
 3. Lifeguards
- Each layer of protection plays an integral role at the waterfront!

First Layer of Protection: Buddies

- The buddy system is more than just pairing campers with their friends, it is meant to provide an additional layer of protection by instructing each camper to be aware of their buddy's location and well-being.
 - Are they missing or in distress?
- The buddy plays a significant role at the waterfront.

Second Layer of Protection: Camp Staff

- Should be present in the correct ratio depending on swim ability (height of water on non-swimmer) and age.
- Should be correctly positioned at the waterfront and paying attention to the bathers.
 - MUST be in the water with non-swimmers
 - Can either be in the water or poolside/edge of water at bathing beach for swimmers
- **Active** supervision and **constant** reinforcement of the buddy system.
 - Mindful of camper's well-being
 - Reminding campers to stay with and be aware of their buddy
- Must be in position **prior** to any campers entering the water.

Second Layer of Protection: Camp Staff

- What we do NOT want to see/hear from camp staff:
 - Staff telling campers the buddy system/buddy pairs are only for when they are on land and are conducting buddy checks.
 - When a lone camper is observed in the water and the staff member is asked who their buddy is and they do not know, “they are not in my group”.
 - Staff should not be congregating together to socialize while supervising!!!
 - Immediate recognition of a distressed bather/missing bather is crucial!

Third Layer of Protection: Lifeguards

- Must be constantly supervising the bathers and not be distracted by anyone or other duties.
 - This includes times of chair rotation
- Must be at a ratio of one lifeguard to 25 **bathers**
- Must be positioned adequately to be able to see all areas of the pool or bathing beach
 - No blind spots or glare
- Must be in position **prior** to any bathers entering the water.

Youtube Video: [What does a real drowning look like?](#)



Lifeguard Surveillance

- “19% of drowning deaths involving children occur in swimming pools with certified lifeguards present, including in camps and camp-like programs.”
- Many drownings go unrecognized by the lifeguard
 - patrons bring it to their attention
 - Incident of this nature occurred at a permitted beach in Westchester County in 2017
- Of all the duties expected of a lifeguard, adequate supervision (without distractions) is the most important!
 - If they do not see or recognize a distressed bather, they cannot save them!

Lifeguard Surveillance

- Lifeguards must provide constant and effective surveillance strategies when scanning the water.
 - Must remain alert, focused and maintain a high level of attention
- Individuals usually drown quickly and quietly.
 - They struggle to maintain their head above the water
 - Rarely able to yell or wave their arms
 - Can submerge as quickly as 20-60 seconds
 - On average, the brain begins to die after 3 minutes of loss of oxygen
 - The longer it takes for the lifeguard to identify the situation will increase the time before the person can be rescued.
 - Increases the chances of permanent brain damage

(Source: A Change in Focus: Improving Lifeguard Vigilance, March 2019)

Lifeguard Surveillance

- Effective surveillance is actively searching the water
 - Allows lifeguards to observe behaviors/hazard, which prevents injury/death
 - Allows for immediate response
- Routine Training
 - Keeps lifeguards proficient in their surveillance and lifesaving skills. Examples of training topics:
 - Emergency response drills
 - Identifying patrons struggling in the water
 - Recognizing signs of drowning
 - Recognizing hazards
 - Surveillance/scanning techniques

(Source: A Change in Focus: Improving Lifeguard Vigilance, March 2019)

Youtube Video: [How to recognize drowning signs, it isn't like in the movies](#)



Breakdown in the Buddy System

The following slides review a few incidents to illustrate what can happen when there is a breakdown in the buddy system and all the layers of protection.

*Incident information obtained from NYS Department of Health

Breakdown in the Buddy System: **Incident #1**

- **Day Camp Drowning:**

- 8 year old male (non-swimmer)
- Approximately 30 campers in the pool
- Discovered by a camper in 5 to 6 feet of water
- Numerous buddy/board system deficiencies
 - Not restricted to water less than chest deep
 - Not assigned a buddy
 - Not visually identified
- Poor lifeguard and counselor positioning

Breakdown in the Buddy System: **Incident #2**

- **17 year old male camper (non-swimmer)**
- **Found in 7 feet of water after touched by a camper. Pool bottom not visible.**
- **No buddies assigned by camp.**
- **No accountability system.**
- **Non-swimmers were not restricted to water less than chest deep and not visually identified.**
- **Safety plan procedures were not implemented.**
- **Counselors not actively supervising campers.**

Breakdown in the Buddy System: **Incident #3**

- Incident occurred at the camp's waterfront (lake) during an open swim activity.
- 9 year old male camper (non-swimmer).
- Victim found in 6 feet of water.
- **Buddy/Board System - modified from approved safety plan.**
 - Campers were required to exit the water and to be accounted for by counselors
 - Buddies did not stay together
 - Triples not limited to one per area

Breakdown in the Buddy System: **Incident #3**

- **Non-swimmers not restricted to water less than chest deep.**
- **Lifeguards - poor positioning, glare issues, no designated areas of supervision and improper age.**
- **Counselors not actively supervising campers.**



6 7:04 PM

Examples of Violations

- One group using swim ability column to indicate bather location and accidentally labeling non-swimmers as swimmers.
- Observed 19 non-swimmers and 6 swimmers in the pool, 3 counselors on the deck and 4 in the water. Non-swimmers water level greater than or equal to chest level, 1:3 ratio not present.
- Observed 19 non-swimmers, 6 swimmers and 4 counselors in the water (29 bathers) and only one lifeguard present.
- Found confusion among buddies who were in different swim types (free and lessons). After buddies were reunited, observed one buddy re-enter water alone in free swim area and other buddy go back to lessons (instructional). Buddy board unorganized hindering accurate pairing of buddies.

Examples of Violations

- Counselor supervising the non-swimmers present at pool side not in the water.
- At the start of the swim the girls group was permitted to enter the water early and the camp guard was not in place but was guarding a small group of patrons during swim lessons.
- Buddy check was not conducted within 15 minutes. This inspector entered the pool area and the group was already present in the water, time was 12:53pm, buddy check was called at 1:13pm which was a 20 minute time span. This inspector asked the camp director how often buddy checks were conducted and the response was every 15-20 minutes.

Examples of Violations

- Two separate campers were listed, on the buddy sheet, next to a name of a camper who was not present at camp at that time. The campers who were present were “told” who their buddy was prior to entering the water. The buddy sheet did not accurately reflect the buddy setup present in the water.
- Observed one buddy in the water, other buddy was on the pool deck on the opposite side of the pool.

Examples of Violations

- Parental signature providing trip swimming permission not provided for campers who were or are currently at camp.
- Buddy sheet for group 1B1 and 1B8 - camper listed and not paired with a buddy. Camper paired with CIT and not noted on sheets.
- Swimming ability not listed on the buddy sheet.
- Observed campers not with their buddies, did not find buddies in timely fashion during checks - non-swimmer alone in water above chest deep when asked who and where his buddy was, he was not able to indicate his location.

Examples of Violations

- Buddies paired ahead of time, actual buddy pairing does not match buddy sheets, sheets not adjusted for campers not swimming and are on pool deck.
- Campers not swimming, standing on deck/under tree not accounted for/ paired with a buddy.
- Specific location of campers (which pool or on grass) not indicated on buddy sheets as per approved safety plan.
- Observed counselor folding a camper's towel during buddy check - did not call out camper names/check not made against buddy sheet, campers not sitting with their buddies.

Examples of Violations

- During buddy check (girls lined up on grass) it was observed camper not present on towel next to her buddy and was running down from the bathroom by herself.
- Boys group - observed a non-swimmer paired with a swimmer and not swimming together. Non-swimmer was in the non-swimmer area and the swimmer was in deeper water.

Questions?

