

International Open Water  
Drowning Prevention Guidelines

## Consensus based guidelines to prevent open water recreation drowning

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### Background

Many people drown while recreating at open water settings (lakes, rivers, oceans)



## Background

- Organizations around the world provide different drowning messages.
- A concise and consistent set of prevention messages is needed.
- Development of drowning prevention guidelines began at
  - workshop at Drowning Prevention Coalition, Seattle
  - workshop at WCD, Porto, Portugal
  - formation of a Task Force of international experts in drowning prevention

## The 18 Member International Task Force

### Co-Chairs:

L Quan (USA), University of Washington School of Medicine and  
Seattle Children's Hospital  
K Moran (New Zealand), University of Auckland  
E Bennett (USA), Seattle Children's Hospital

### Members:

S Beerman (Canada), J Bierens (Netherlands), BC Brewster  
(USA), J Connelly (Ireland), N Farmer (Australia), R Franklin  
(Australia), P George (Australia), J Kania (Kenya), B Matthews  
(Australia), A Rahman (Bangladesh), R Stallman (Norway), T  
Stanley (New Zealand), D Szpilman (Brazil), RMK Tan  
(Singapore), M Tipton (UK),

### Secretariat:

M Tansik (USA)

## Developing the set of Guidelines

The Task Force addressed 5 questions:

- What **hazards** in the environment should I check for when I, my group, or my family goes to open water settings?
- What **rules** should I have for myself, my group or my family around open water?
- What kind of **supervision** should there be for children, teens and adults around open water?
- What **skills** should I or someone nearby have to protect myself or others around open water?
- What **technology** aids should I bring or make sure are available to aid drowning prevention in open water environments?

## Methods

- Created a list of guidelines for two groups:
  - *Keep Yourself Safe* and *Keep Others Safe*.
- Prioritized the guidelines using a modified Delphi technique that consisted of two rounds of ranking the messages.
- Combined and approved the wording of the final messages.
  - All final messages received at least 80% approval by Task Force members.

### Keep Yourself Safe

1. Learn swimming and water safety survival skills.



### Keep Yourself Safe

2. Always swim with others.



### Keep Yourself Safe

3. Obey all safety signs and warning flags.



### Keep Yourself Safe

4. Never go in the water after drinking alcohol.



### Keep Yourself Safe

5. Know how and when to use a lifejacket.



### Keep Yourself Safe

6. Swim in areas with lifeguards.



### Keep Yourself Safe

7. Know the water and weather conditions before getting in the water.



### Keep Yourself Safe

8. Always enter shallow and unknown water feet first.



### Keep Others Safe

1. Help and encourage others, especially children, to learn swimming and water safety survival skills.



### Keep Others Safe

2. Swim in areas with lifeguards.





### Keep Others Safe

#### 3. Set water safety rules.



### Keep Others Safe

#### 4. Always provide close and constant attention to children you are supervising in or near water.



### Keep Others Safe

5. Know how and when to use life jackets, especially with children and weak swimmers.



### Keep Others Safe

6. Learn first aid and CPR.



### Keep Others Safe

7. Learn safe ways of rescuing others without putting yourself in danger.



### Keep Others Safe

8. Obey all safety signs and warning flags.



### Limitations

- Task Force composition
  - Not representative of countries, DP types, cultures
- English language- translation required
- Cultural translation required
- Evidence basis incomplete

### Evidence basis for guidelines

**Evidence:**  
Avoid alcohol



### Evidence basis for guidelines

**Evidence:**

Avoid alcohol

**No Evidence:**

### Evidence basis?

Learn swimming and water safety survival skills.



## Evidence basis for guidelines

**Evidence:**

Avoid alcohol  
Learn to swim

**No Evidence:**

## Evidence basis for guidelines

**Evidence:**

Avoid alcohol  
Learn to swim  
Learn CPR  
Wear a life jacket  
Swim in Lifeguarded areas

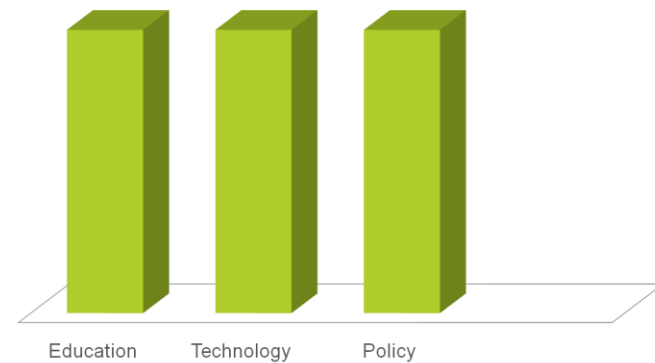
**No Evidence:**

Signage  
Swim with others  
Feet first into water  
Supervise closely and constantly  
Learn rescue skills  
Know the water  
Set rules

## Implications

- Simple generic messages, wide range recreational open water settings, all population groups
- Promotes preparedness, planning, prior to arrival; responsibility
- Expands definition of what is supervision
  - Constant, close, unimpaired
  - Awareness, recognition of distress
  - Responsivity- what to do: rescue, call for help
- Establishes a research agenda for OW drowning prevention

## Three Pillars of Injury Prevention



### Next steps: Education

- Make the guidelines available in different languages
- Disseminate the guidelines to:
  - Local, national, and international organizations promoting water safety
  - General public
- Encourage organizations to adapt the guidelines to address their local open water settings and groups at risk for drowning

### Next steps: Policy to Legislation for “Learn to swim”

#### Increase access to swimming

- especially among low-income and culturally diverse children, youth, and families



#### Require swimming lessons or swim proficiency for completion of grade school



Photo: Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh



Next steps: Education to Policy to Legislation for  
**“Swim where there is a lifeguard”**

Identify lifeguarded sites

Ensure adequate training  
for OW lifeguarding

Develop funding for  
ensuring lifeguarded sites

Develop alternatives to  
lifeguarded sites



Next steps: Education to Policy to Legislation for  
**“Know the water conditions”**

Identify unsafe waters used  
for recreation

- Prohibit swimming,  
boating in them

Score them (OW score card)

Identify existing water  
recreation standards for  
bathing beaches, swim  
areas, and other high use  
water recreation areas

Improve safety at these  
sites



Next steps: Education to Policy to Legislation for  
**“Don’t drink alcohol and swim”**

Legislate for stronger laws to prevent alcohol use

- Boating
- Public beaches

Increase enforcement of laws



Next steps: Education to Policy to Legislation for  
**“Know when and how to use Life jackets”**

Identify access to life jackets

Increase access to life jackets

1. Lower cost
2. Life jacket loaner programs
  - Identify where they are
  - Increase programs at sites used by boaters and swimmers

Legislate life jacket use on boats-recreational

- for children, teens, all age groups



### Drowning Prevention Workshop in Porto, 2007

#### Recommendations:

- Develop a process for in-depth discussion of these issues and top recommendations
- Consider consensus statement by ILS
- Develop a research agenda based on the identified issues

### Next Steps in 2011?



## Special Thanks to the Task Force members

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### Secretariat:

M Tansik (USA)

## Thank You!

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