

LEISURE SAFETY

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SINK
OR

WIN

ROSPA
The Royal Society for the
Prevention of Accidents

Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools

First Aid

Main Pool
Viewing Area



By David Walker,
RoSPA leisure
safety manager, &
Pete Wells, Fitness
Industry Association
quality manager

Taking the long view, managed swimming pools are now as safe as they have ever been, and over the last 30 years they are by far the safest place to swim.

It hasn't always been this way. RoSPA's drowning statistics report shows that throughout most of the 1980's there was an average of 28 deaths a year in swimming pools, with a high of 49 in 1983. Post 2000, there has been an average of eight fatalities a year, with a number of these involving adults with pre-existing medical conditions. Today, the annual risk of a fatal incident involving a child under eight years old, in a pool, is one in 5.5 million, a very rare event.

This is a remarkable improvement, in the region of a 90 per cent reduction in fatal incidents. So, what were the key factors which brought about such a change? A number of issues were repeatedly raised by studies and courts in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as poor or inadequate design, unclear or inconsistent management approaches, and failures in supervision. The incidents gave rise to a renewed focus being placed on to the management of pools, leading to the introduction of Safety in Swimming Pools guidance in 1988. Further revisions were published in 1999 and 2003.

There have been challenges and controversies in recent years. The most notable of these is the ongoing challenge of managing child admission ratios. The application of the guidance to non-standard swimming pools, such as segregated sections of rivers and tidal pools, the increasingly tight financial arrangements which constrain operators, and specific measures such as lifeguarding also cause debate. There are also concerns over advice given by some consultants. There needs to be clarity over what is demanded by law and what is discretionary advice.

It can be all too easy in the drive to create a safer environment to forget our wider responsibilities, specifically the need to enable positive physical activity. The leisure industry, particularly through swimming, along with cycling and walking, is on the front line in the battle against sedentary lifestyles and the ill health outcomes such as obesity, diabetes and premature death.

A troubling trend which RoSPA is concerned about is that only one in three children, at the age of 11, cannot meet the national swimming and water safety standard, which includes being able to swim 25 metres unaided. We are in danger of allowing a generation to grow up without the opportunity to learn a skill which will keep them healthy and potentially safer. It's worth remembering that accidental deaths in all water have remained consistently around the 400 mark for the last decade, some 10 per cent of these being children swimming and playing in open water.

HSE in consultation with industry stakeholders is currently revising Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools. Our contributors have outlined some of their key issues that are to be considered. The current revision process is now in its early phases, with an expected publication date of March 2014. Reader comments are welcome, email djwalker@rospa.com

Allison Spears (HSE) and David Walker (RoSPA) will be leading a workshop on September 19 during Leisure Industry Week exploring some of the key issues relevant to the revised guidance.

Dennis Freeman Wright, ASA

The Amateur Swimming Association's position reflects the views of the current Government in that health and safety legislation and guidance as applied to the swimming industry and sport, particularly if it is a constraint to growth and participation should be reviewed, considered carefully and diluted if possible.

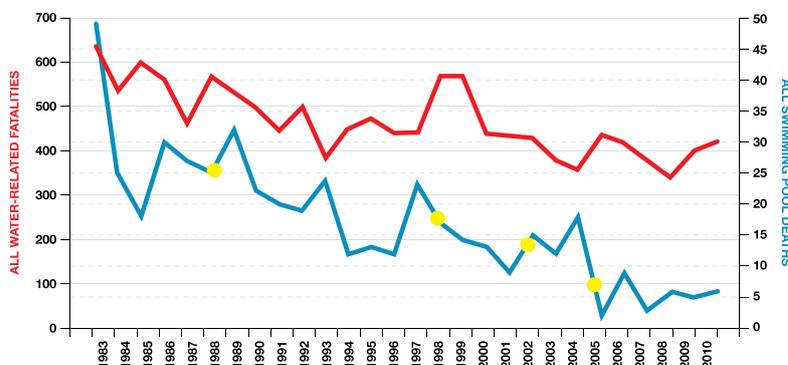
Although HSG 179 is an admirable document it is onerous, particularly when compared to the equivalent BS EN Regulations and other guidance documents dealing with the same issues. The issues which particularly concern the Amateur Swimming Association are:

- The section on the design of swimming pools is comprehensively dealt with by the Sport England Design Notes and could perhaps be removed.
- The section on water treatment is also dealt with comprehensively by the Pool Water Technical Advisory Group and could also be reconsidered.
- The issues relating to pool water space per bather, which has done so much to reduce swimmer numbers should also be re-examined to ensure that such an arbitrary guide is supported by facts.
- The competencies of lifeguards should relate to the type of water space they are supervising rather than being based on a questionable skill set.

Dennis is the national facilities officer for the Amateur Swimming Association, a post he has held for six years. Together with the ASA facilities team his role is to ensure that swimming pools are built and maintained as "fit for purpose" not only for competitive swimming but for all forms of community aquatic activity. Dennis is a chartered member of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and also holds the association's health and safety remit.



- Safety in Swimming Pools introduced (1988)
- British & European Standard produced for design and management (1998)
- National child admission ratios introduced (2002), and revised (2005)



Andy Read, DC Leisure

DC Leisure want to achieve a position where all pools operate in an equally safe way, whoever operates, with particular regard to parents taking responsibility for their children including if they leave their child by themselves - taking into account age and swimming ability.

We would like confidence that the HSE will advise their own staff and HO's (and positively influence independent consultants) to use the guidance to manage the standard expected rather than to be judged on what they "may or may not have done over and above the guidance". We believe that this is critical when incidents are reviewed prior to and at an inquest or court.

The current guidance is comprehensive and covers most aspects of managing pools, but we would like to see changes including guidance on;

- Lifeguard footwear and suitable swimwear.
- Relationship between operators and architects (glare/reflection).
- Building new facilities as well as existing facilities with design issues.
- Determining numbers of lifeguards structured considering all factors.
- Small pools and unusually large pools.

As well as

- Remove the physical environment (retaining paragraphs 129 - 130 including Table 1, as this has information is unlikely to be produced by SE).
- Logical indexed structure for easy reference

Andy has worked in leisure for 36 years, with local authorities, trusts and private operators, as well as industry bodies such as the CIMSPA, FIA and ASA. He led the successful completion of OHSAS 18001 and CHAS for DC Leisure. DC Leisure work in partnership with local authorities providing leisure facilities and activities which are at the heart of the community.

Wayne Sills, facilities development manager for Derby City Council

HSG 179 provides a very good source of information and guidance for swimming pool managers. It also provides a good reference point, particularly for staff who are new to pool operation or are unsure on certain aspects of swimming pool operation and health and safety requirements.

As well as looking at current operation it also provides a useful check and challenge for any future developments and new builds to ensure appropriate safety measures are considered.

The comprehensive index listing makes it easy to use as a quick-reference document as well as a document used to help shape the pool operation

It would be useful to have the document split into different sections to reflect the different types of pool; for example a section on leisure pools may be section for different types of pools so regulation section on leisure pool being separate to traditional pool. This could make it much easier for managers and staff to go straight to the area they need. It would be useful to have some of the text broken up through use of more diagrams, tables and photographs to help staff read and use it.

Wayne is responsible for the Council's Leisure Centre, outdoor sports facilities, golf, football development and leased / contracted sports facilities.

Caleb Brown, David Lloyd Leisure

The current guidance expressed in Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools, HSG179, offers a good comprehensive foundation of swimming pool safety management and it is highly beneficial that it is endorsed by the HSE.

The document should be updated following the principles expressed in the recent health and safety reviews conducted by Lord Young and Professor Löfstedt: with the emphasis placed on proportionality of controls based on the relevant level of risk and an onus on an individual, as well as the facility, to be responsible for their actions.

The structure of the guidance could also be improved to make it easier to navigate by having two distinct parts, namely 'Poolside/Front of House' and 'Pool Plant Room/Back of House'. Each section could then set out the general industry requirements and then provide more specific guidance depending on the type of operating sector e.g. private clubs, public, trust, leisure park or hotel to facilitate both relevance and ease of reference for each different operator.

The provision and use of Automated External Defibrillators could be expanded upon to reflect their simplicity of use, ease of training and the vastly increased chance of survival they offer in comparison with CPR alone.

Caleb works as part of the health and safety team for David Lloyd Leisure and his areas of responsibility cover swimming pool safety and mandatory first aid, lifeguard and AED training. David Lloyd Leisure is Europe's largest racquets, health and fitness operator with 89 clubs in eight European countries. Caleb is a member of the FIA safety group.

