

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

*Information guide for owners, operators and controllers of public swimming pools*

# Managing drowning risks at publicly accessible pools

Could you live with someone drowning on your watch?

## Why manage drowning risks at pools?

Swimming pools are used mainly by children and young people as an avenue for having fun. While the death of anyone from drowning is a tragedy, the death of a child or a young person is catastrophic.

There are substantial penalties in the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* (Act) if it is found that a pool operator has not taken adequate steps to prevent a person drowning.

More information on peoples' obligations under the Act can be found at [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au).

## Hazards and risks

Public swimming pools present a number of hazards that may contribute to the risk of drowning, such as:

- large bodies of water with a large number of people using it at any one time
- the presence of children and adults with varying levels of swimming expertise
- excited children who may have limited ability to make sound judgements about the riskiness of their behaviour
- the presence of devices, such as personal buoyancy devices (floaties, tubes) or large pieces of equipment permanently or semi-permanently located in pools for common use (slides, jumping castles), that may impair the vision of adults or pool operators supervising pool activities.

The preferred method for minimising risk is to eliminate the hazard. However, eliminating these hazards would act to the detriment of the community benefits obtained by providing a place for healthy and active activities. With this in mind it is necessary for operators of public pools to minimise the risks arising from these hazards through other methods.

Suitable control methods can include but are not limited to:

- ensuring young patrons or patrons of limited swimming competency are accompanied by adults who will be able to provide the necessary supervision
- prohibiting activities that may increase the risk of people being injured while using the pool, such as diving, "bombing" and running

- providing information or signage about pool safety, including the need for accompanying adults to supervise their children and the types of activities that are prohibited while using the pool facilities
- supervising pool occupants by appropriately competent and responsible people, i.e. adequately trained lifesavers or supervisors
- removing or prohibiting the use of permanent or semi-permanent flotation devices when adequate supervision cannot be maintained
- restricting entry to areas that present increased risk and require higher levels of swimming competency, e.g. slides, diving boards, deep water.

Where large inflatable or floating structures are installed in commercial or public pools, pool operators need to conduct a risk assessment on the use of the structure before it is used by the public.

The risk assessment must take into account:

- relevant information provided by the manufacturer of the structure, (manufacturers' instructions and operating procedures)
- the ability of attendants to maintain a clear line of sight of patrons using the structure
- the depth of the water
- environmental conditions (noise, weather)
- likelihood of a person falling:
  - off the inflatable
  - onto the inflatable
  - into the water
  - onto the pool edges
- number of the patrons able to use the structure
- physical size and ability of the patrons using the structure.

The pool operator must develop and implement procedures for the safe operation of the structure that eliminates or minimises the risks identified in the risk assessment process.

The pool operator's staff are to be trained in the procedures with particular emphasis on emergency situations. In this regard, scenario based training is encouraged.

The pool operator must monitor and review the implementation of these procedures,

including the ongoing assessment of staff competency in being able to utilise such procedures in various circumstances.

### **Guidelines for safe pool operation**

The Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) Guidelines provide useful information about applying suitable controls for the use of pools. These guidelines include a checklist which can be used to determine the risks presented by particular pools and their uses, so that suitable controls can be selected. The information below sets out the scope of the guidelines.

The RLSSA *Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations* should be used by pool operators as a minimum standard for operating their pool.

Pool operators who cannot meet these requirements, including supervision, set out in these guidelines must identify other suitable ways to prevent or minimise the risks of drowning.

Although these guidelines are published by RLSSA, they were developed in consultation with, and represent the collective opinion of, the aquatics industry across Australia. As a result, the guidelines have become a minimum standards document, similar to an Australian standard, providing advice to the aquatics industry on the minimum requirements for particular situations.

The guidelines are a prime point of reference for the legal community when issues in the aquatic industry go to court, particularly in relation to the provision of supervision by lifeguards. They have been examined and referred to in various Coroner's and Magistrate's Courts across Australia.

### **Guidelines for water safety**

In addition to the *Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations*, the RLSSA has developed *Guidelines for Water Safety* applicable for use in other aquatic environments including

those:

- operated by:
  - bodies corporate
  - hotels, motels, camping and caravan grounds
  - commercial learn to swim and school pools
- that are part of urban water developments.

The safety considerations listed here do not encompass residential swimming pools and spas that are covered by existing local building regulations and safety programs.

The *Guidelines for Water Safety - Body Corporate Pools* are relevant to any swimming pool and/or spa facilities that unit owners and occupiers can enjoy as common property under the governance of a body corporate.

These guidelines are intended to provide a general guide for the management of aquatic risk and may be applied to a very wide range of activities or operations of any body corporate aquatic environment.

Such aquatic amenities may be found in:

- residential units
- apartment blocks
- high rise style apartments
- retirement villages.

These guidelines hold relevant advice for designers, developers, government authorities, real estate agents, governing bodies, local council authorities, body corporate members and residents on water safety considerations that should be integral to the design, development and the long-term operation of the swimming pools and spas within the body corporate setting.

The *Guidelines for Water Safety - Hotel, Motel, Camping and Caravan Grounds* are relevant to any swimming pool and/or spa facility located within a resort, hotel, motel, camping or caravan ground environment.

These guidelines are directed to:

- swimming pool and facility operators
- maintenance personnel
- managerial personnel
- industry bodies
- staff.

These guidelines have been created to give relevant advice to designers, developers, government authorities, tourism industry personnel, governing bodies and hotel, motel, camping and caravan ground staff and clientele. These guidelines should be integral to the design, operation and long-term success of swimming pools and spas within the resort, hotel, motel, camping and caravan ground environment. They offer pool operators significant and detailed information on the management of aquatic facilities, while providing a secure, user-friendly aquatic environment for all guests.

The *Guidelines for Water Safety - Commercial Learn to Swim and School Pools* are relevant to any swimming pool and/or spa facility located within a commercial 'learn to swim' environment or a swimming pool located at a school.

These guidelines are designed for commercial 'learn to swim' and school pool:

- facility operators
- maintenance personnel
- managerial personnel
- industry bodies
- staff.

These guidelines have been created to give relevant advice to designers, developers, government authorities, aquatic industry personnel, governing bodies, educators, fitness industry practitioners and commercial learn to swim staff and clientele.

The *Guidelines for Water Safety - Urban Water Developments* are relevant to purpose-built water environments, near or around areas which the general public may frequent, and would include:

- residential developments in both urban and rural settings
- commercial developments such as shopping precincts and hospitality venues
- a combination of residential and commercial developments
- public spaces, e.g. parkland and reserves.

These guidelines contain vital information for land managers, developers, landscape architects, urban planners, local government agencies and state/territory government agencies.

### **Royal Life Saving Society fact sheets**

The Royal Life Saving Society Australia produces a number of fact sheets and national policies which are likely to be of assistance to swimming pool operators and inspectors.

The policies are approved by the Royal Life Saving National Council and are reviewed at regular intervals.

Copies of the fact sheets can be found at: [www.royallifesaving.com.au/www/html/156-fact-sheets.asp](http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/www/html/156-fact-sheets.asp)

Copies of the policies can be found at: [www.royallifesaving.com.au/www/html/441-national-policies-.asp](http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/www/html/441-national-policies-.asp)

For more information visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

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