



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

*Canada's Lifeguarding Experts*

# WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

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by the

Lifesaving Society  
B.C. & Yukon Branch



## LIFESAVING SOCIETY

*Canada's Lifeguarding Experts*

The Lifesaving Society is a national, charitable organization working to prevent drowning and water-related injuries through lifeguard training, water safety education, research and advocacy. (Legal entity is the Royal Life Saving Society Canada.)

All donations are gratefully received. A charitable receipt for income tax purposes is issued for donations over ten dollars. Charitable Registration No.119129039 RR0001.

**WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES**

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Published by the Lifesaving Society, B.C. & Yukon Branch  
#112 - 3989 Henning Drive, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 6N5  
Phone: (604) 299-5450  
Fax: (604) 299-5795  
E-Mail: Lifesaving\_Society@bc.sympatico.ca  
[www.wp.com/LifesavingBC](http://www.wp.com/LifesavingBC)

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The B.C. & Yukon Branch gratefully acknowledges the right to  
adaptation of the Ontario Branch Waterfront Safety Guidelines, 1994.

# WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

## Preface

- *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* is designed to assist waterfront owners and operators in British Columbia and the Yukon in providing a safe aquatic environment for their patrons. It is written and distributed as a service to Lifesaving Society Affiliates and Members in response to their many questions about safe waterfront operations.
- The Society is often asked to give an expert opinion on drownings. *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* explains the B.C. & Yukon Branch's viewpoint on safety issues related to waterfronts. It is meant to educate owners and operators about safety expectations as a preventative measure before drownings occur. It is also meant to give owners and operators a clear understanding of the Lifesaving Society's position.
- *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* offers recommendations for minimum standards of operation for waterfront facilities where the general public is admitted for aquatic activity. Recommendations apply to both supervised and unsupervised swimming areas, unless otherwise specified.
- There is currently no legislation or regulations governing the operation of waterfronts. *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* in no way replaces or supersedes any local by-laws or other regulations. Owners and operators must obey all by-laws specific to their waterfront facility and operations.
- Owners and operators who maintain a higher standard than outlined in this document are commended. They should not lower their expectations, but work towards further improvements.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### Preface (cont'd)

- Those who do not meet the minimum recommendations are encouraged to upgrade the safety of their operation. *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* offers a starting point, and will serve as a resource for action.
- Safety is viewed as an ongoing process. The B.C. & Yukon Branch of the Lifesaving Society strongly recommends that all waterfront owners and operators set goals for the improvement of public safety and work towards them, documenting their efforts.
- It is recognized that not every facility will be able to implement all of the recommendations immediately. In such cases, owners and operators are encouraged to devise a risk management plan that works towards implementing the *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* in stages.
- Each waterfront has unique features and no single document can adequately address every situation and need. The minimum standards of the *Waterfront Safety Guidelines* may not meet the safety requirements of all facilities. Owners and operators should customize safety efforts, remembering always that patron safety is paramount.
- By the same token, a recommendation may be impractical or impossible to implement at a particular facility due to an unusual geographical feature, or for other reasons. Owners and operators should apply good judgment in fulfilling the *intent* of the *Waterfront Safety Guidelines*. The *intent* of the recommendation must be met – that a victim receives care from the emergency medical services as quickly as possible.
- Owners and operators are referred to *Alert: Lifeguarding in Action*, the textbook of the National Lifeguard Service, for further guidance on how to improve the safety of their waterfront facilities.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### DEFINITIONS

Throughout the *Waterfront Safety Guidelines*:

- ▶ **Owner** means a person or corporation who owns a waterfront facility.
- ▶ **Operator** means a person designated by the owner as being responsible for the operation of the waterfront facility.
- ▶ **Lifeguard** means a person designated by the owner or operator to maintain surveillance over the patrons on the beach or in the water, to supervise patron safety and to respond to emergency situations.

It is recommended that every lifeguard shall:

- ◆ be at least seventeen years of age.
- ◆ hold current National Lifeguard Service (NLS) certification (Waterfront Option is desirable)
- ◆ have training in waterfront patrolling and emergency procedures relevant to the specific facility and prior to the first shift of lifeguarding.

In cases where NLS personnel are unavailable, and the Lifesaving Society's Bronze Cross Award holders are hired as lifeguards, further skill training must be provided in waterfront patrol, emergency response and lifeguarding skills. Staff should be encouraged to gain the NLS certificate.

- ▶ **Assistant Lifeguard** means a person designated by the owner or operator to assist the lifeguard to supervise patron safety.

It is recommended that every assistant lifeguard shall:

- ◆ be at least sixteen years old.
- ◆ hold a current Bronze Cross certification.
- ◆ have training in waterfront patrolling and emergency procedures relevant to the specific facility and prior to the first shift of assistant lifeguarding.

- ▶ **Swimming Area** means that section of the waterfront marked & designated exclusively for swimming and wading activity.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Every owner and operator has the responsibility to maintain the beach and designated swimming and wading area in a safe condition. The intent of this recommendation is that patrons are informed of areas suitable for swimming and wading, and that these areas are kept free of personal watercraft and other boats.
- The designated swimming areas must be clearly seen and recognized from the water as such by users of personal watercraft and other boaters.
- Swimming area and beach are free from hazards, such as broken glass, hidden underwater dangers, etc.
- Swimming area and beach intended for use by patrons are clearly designated through signs, buoylines, buoy markers or a combination of these.
- Signs are posted and clearly visible to patrons indicating location of nearest first aid station and emergency telephone (or other communication device).
- At supervised waterfronts, signs are posted and clearly visible to patrons indicating hours of supervision.
- At unsupervised waterfronts, signs are posted and clearly visible to patrons indicating the swimming area is not supervised.
- Water depth changes and hazards such as drop-offs or rocky bottoms are clearly identified.
- A system of communicating conditions to patrons is desirable. For example, such a system may indicate cold water temperatures, adverse weather, or warn patrons of an increased risk or danger. One example is a flag system.

## *WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES*

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES (cont'd)**

- A communication device for emergency use is accessible to the beach and swimming area.
- Telephones are strongly recommended, to be located no more than 100 metres away from the beach and swimming area.
- In cases where telephones are not feasible, other suitable methods of communication and strategies for reaching the emergency medical services are employed, such as walkie-talkies or CB Radios.
- Equipment inspection and maintenance programs are established, with timely follow-up action on repairs and replacements. These should include daily and weekly inspections, as well as end-of-season and start-of-season, with records kept.



## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### **GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISED WATERFRONTS**

- Where lifeguard supervision is provided, the owner and operator shall ensure the waterfront is operated in accordance with the following guidelines:
  - ▶ Every lifeguard and assistant lifeguard is currently qualified and meets age requirements (see page 3).
  - ▶ Every lifeguard and assistant lifeguard has been trained in waterfront patrolling and emergency procedures relevant to the specific facility prior to his or her first shift.
  - ▶ Clearly written emergency procedures are provided and posted.
  - ▶ Emergency procedures are regularly reviewed and practiced at in-service training sessions held throughout the duration of the lifeguards' employment.
  - ▶ Number of assistant lifeguards on duty does not exceed the number of lifeguards.
  - ▶ At no time are there less than 2 lifeguards, or 1 lifeguard and 1 assistant lifeguard supervising the swimming area.

This recommendation represents a minimum standard. A greater number of lifeguards is desirable, and in some situations, is required to safely supervise the swimming area. Refer below for guidance.

- ▶ An adequate number of lifeguards to safely supervise the swimming area are on duty at any one time. The number of lifeguards required changes according to the needs and conditions of each waterfront facility. Owners and operators must apply good judgment to their own situations.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### **GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISED WATERFRONTS (cont'd)**

- ▶ Factors affecting numbers of lifeguards required include among others:
  - length of shoreline
  - bather load
  - concentration of bather load
  - potential dangers such as drop-offs
  - geographical features, such as curves or bends in shoreline affecting the lifeguards' view
  - water and weather conditions
  - experience and training of lifeguards
  - ratio of assistant lifeguards to lifeguards
  - type of patron activity engaged in
  - width of swimming area.

Larger more complex waterfront facilities require more lifeguards, and often with increased or specialized training. So too will facilities with larger bather loads or concentrations, or patron activities which place increased demands on lifeguards.

Where equipment, leisure accessories or other structures are present, additional supervision is provided.

In the opinion of the operator, this additional supervision must be adequate, taking into consideration the number and type of equipment, leisure accessories, and structures present.

- Accident and Incident Reports are established and maintained to record the "when, where, who, why and what action taken" for all incidents, accidents and emergencies (see *Alert: Lifeguarding in Action* for a sample incident report).

Reports include maps of the area to record locations of incidents, accidents and emergencies so that patterns may be established and preventative action taken.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### **GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISED WATERFRONTS (cont'd)**

- Lifeguards are clothed in such a way as to be readily identified as such. This clothing should not restrict physical movement or emergency response time. UV protection, polarized sunglasses, hat, and whistle are also included as part of the lifeguard's personal equipment, as well as protective gloves and pocket face masks. Binoculars are desirable.
- The following equipment is available and present at all times, in good working order, checked daily for breakdowns or faults, and easily accessible in case of an emergency:
  - ▶ one buoyant rescue aid attached to a shoulder loop with a 6 mm line at least 1.6 m in length for each lifeguard on duty.
  - ▶ masks, snorkels and fins are available for searches
  - ▶ a paddleboard or boat, when any part of the supervised area is more than 50 metres from shore. A paddleboard is desirable when any part of the supervised area is more than 25 metres from shore.
  - ▶ a spineboard, able to fit on an ambulance stretcher, with suitable strapping that will immobilize the total body.
  - ▶ an elevated lifeguard tower or station, not less than 1.8 metres above the water surface, and that permits an unobstructed view of the entire area under surveillance. Lifeguard safety is a priority. Lifeguard tower and stations should have safe railing and ladder/steps, and be maintained in good condition.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### **GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISED WATERFRONTS (cont'd)**

- ▶ first aid supplies, in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of the facility, and that include:
  - protective gloves (sterilized and unsterilized)
  - pocket face masks
  - scissors
  - triangular bandages
  - sterile bandages
  - sterile gauze pads (50 mm by 50 mm, and 100 mm by 100 mm)
  - rolls of gauze conform bandages
  - eye pads
  - adhesive tape
  - emergency blankets/wrap
  - safety pins
  - tweezers
  - cold packs
  - antiseptic solution
  - Incident and Accident Report forms
  - splinting material
  - pencil/pen/note pad
  - watch or other mechanism for timing
  - clamps and hazardous waste bottle for needles.
  - portable phone (inside a waterproof bag) is recommended where telephones lines are not available.

## **GUIDELINES FOR WATERFRONTS**

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### WITHOUT SUPERVISION

Lifeguard supervision is desirable. Where no lifeguard supervision is provided, the owner and operator shall ensure that the waterfront facility is operated in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Telephone for emergency use or another communication device, such as a CB radio, is available.
- Signs are posted at entrances and exits, or where there are not specific entrances and exits, at reasonable intervals along/near the swimming area, indicating:
  - ▶ *“Swimming area is not supervised; children require direct supervision by parents or adults”*
  - ▶ location of telephone for emergency use (or other communication device), and nearest first aid station
  - ▶ diving can result in serious injury or death; patrons are cautioned no diving and to perform only foot first entries in areas unsafe for diving, or where uncertain of water depth.
- The nearest emergency telephone (or other communication device) carries a listing of names and numbers of the emergency services, and other relevant instructions.
- The following rescue equipment is provided in places conveniently located for emergency use at waterfront facilities where the public is invited to swim, but the swimming area is not supervised:
  - ▶ a non-conductive reaching pole 3 metres in length
  - ▶ a buoyant throwing aid attached to a 6 mm line at least 8 metres in length.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### **GUIDELINES FOR WATERFRONTS WITHOUT SUPERVISION (cont'd)**

- In areas of the waterfront facility where swimming is not invited, signs are posted that stipulate "*No swimming*".

Signs should also indicate location of nearest emergency telephone or communication device, first aid station and emergency equipment.

## WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES

### RESCUE CRAFT

- Rescue craft are recommended at any waterfront that has supervised recreational boating, such as canoeing, wind sailing, sailing, paddle boating, personal watercraft, power boating, or their unsupervised use in the nearby vicinity.
- The primary role of the rescue craft is emergency use. Clearly mark the rescue craft to indicate this purpose.
- Size and type of rescue craft is dependent upon individual waterfront needs.
- Some lakes and waterways have engine size restrictions. Check with authorities for information about your area.
- Essential equipment for a rescue boat includes:
  - ▶ lifejacket or PFD for each person in the boat
  - ▶ two paddles
  - ▶ extra gas (if applicable)
  - ▶ a bailer
  - ▶ tow rope
  - ▶ fire extinguisher
  - ▶ sound making device
  - ▶ binoculars
  - ▶ first aid kit
  - ▶ blanket
  - ▶ splints
  - ▶ mask, snorkel and fins
  - ▶ lifesaving equipment, such as a ring buoy, rescue can, rescue tube.
- A communication device, such as a marine style walkie-talkie, CB and/or a cellular phone are also desirable in some situations, particularly on large bodies of water.

## **WATERFRONT SAFETY GUIDELINES**

### **RESCUE CRAFT (cont'd)**

- Develop a daily check list for staff to ensure the rescue craft is in good working order. Inspect hull, engine (if applicable), parts and equipment every day.
- Ensure every person using the rescue craft has instruction on its operation and safe handling.
- A Canadian Power and Sail Squadron course is recommended for lifeguarding staff using motorized rescue craft.