



POSITION STATEMENT

When any missing person, regardless of age, is last seen in or around the pool area, an immediate in-water search with mask or goggles should be performed by a minimum of one lifeguard.

BACKGROUND

Although a long standing "best practice" in the British Columbia & Yukon Branch, there is no official policy or position statement on the importance of an underwater search for a missing person. The corresponding "Must See" for the missing person item from the current NL Award Guide (June 2006) reads:

"Thorough search in area where missing person was last seen or area of greatest danger if not seen" (Item #5 - Pool Search: Missing Person).

A corresponding "Note" for the missing person item reads:

"It is not necessary to clear the pool for an effective search of the water. Any method that can be used to confirm that the victim has not drowned is acceptable."

The Alert manual (Jan 2003) states that the two options for an underwater search in a swimming pool are:

- a) a safety stop followed by a scan of the bottom from lifeguard chairs or the deck or
- b) an underwater search with mask or goggles.

Candidates are ultimately judged by the "Must Sees" within the NL Award Guide; specific techniques and information are found in the Alert Manual as well as in current Update guides. An in-water search technique is currently not a pass or fail item in NL. However, it is something that should be taught and encouraged in every NL Course and NL Recert in the British Columbia & Yukon Branch.

RATIONALE

The fastest and most reliable way to check the "area of greatest danger" is to enter the water with goggles so the lifeguard can effectively perform a thorough bottom scan of the pool. There are numerous challenges for a lifeguard searching the pool from the deck to effectively see the bottom clearly:

1. Pool clarity may not be ideal

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2. Surface turbulence greatly reduces visibility
3. Many lifeguards focus their attention on the water surface, not below the surface
4. Victims may not always thrash on the surface before they sink, the submersion episode may be very subtle and non-dramatic
5. Lighting and pool bottom colors make objects on the bottom difficult to see in some locations

REFERENCES

Griffiths, Tom & Moore, Cathleen. (November 2004). *A Matter of Perception: Why lifeguards fail to see victims on the bottom of the pool*. *Aquatics International*, Retrieved from <http://www.aquaticsafetygroup.com/publications.html>

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