



National Lifeguard Standard (Item 5a):

A Lifeguard should be able to effectively scan an assigned zone within a window of 10 to 30 seconds.

BACKGROUND

A lifeguard's primary responsibility is incident prevention through facility analysis, education and supervision. While most water safety experts agree that constant, vigilant supervision is the primary duty of all lifeguards – vigilance is very difficult to maintain, particularly when the visual tasks become repetitive and routine.

In the 1980s, Frank Pia developed the RID Factor (Recognition, Intrusion, Distraction), which deals mostly with victim recognition and why attention should not be diverted from the water. Pia noted how subtly and suddenly people can drown. One important result of his work is the realization that a victim may remain on the surface for a very short time. His work reinforces *why* lifeguards must maintain vigilant scanning.

Ellis & Associates, a Houston lifeguard training organization and safety consulting firm, developed a '10/20 Patron Protection Rule' which covers primarily scanning and response times: 10 seconds to detect someone in distress and an additional 20 seconds to respond. Ellis preaches this rule because it is possible for a patron to drown in as little as 30 seconds.

The Lifesaving Society established the '10-30 Scanning Window', a span of time that it would take to scan across the zone of responsibility and back to the starting point of that scan. This Scanning window provides for the typical variables that affect scanning time such as: type of facility, size of zone, number of bathers and their activities, and equipment used by bathers.

RATIONALE

Each zone that a lifeguard is responsible for should be scanned within a window of 10 to 30 seconds. The scan must include:

- The surface, middle and bottom of pool basins (including hot tubs)
- Areas of bather congestion
- Hazards, blind spots, basin edges and corners
- Fixed and portable equipment

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10-30 Scanning Window

- Other lifeguards on duty

If a lifeguard is unable to effectively scan their whole zone in less than 30 seconds, then the size of the zone would need to be adjusted and another lifeguard would be required on the rotation. ***This is done to ensure public safety as most drownings occur in less than 30 seconds.***

REFERENCES

Alert Insert (page 1) and Alert: Aquatic Supervision in Action (page 2)

Frank Pia - <https://www.pia-enterprises.com/>

Ellis & Associates - <https://jellis.com/>

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