

Each year about 1500 young people drown in the U.S., over a third in guarded pools.

As we all know, a drowning can occur nearly anywhere. Yet, the natural inclination is to believe that one will not happen in our own community, especially at our own YMCA. Awareness of the threat's reality is critical. Reinforcing proven prevention strategies is an essential element in protecting the kids in our programs. Both are the goals for our "Aquatic Alert" program.

Each alert is a brief treatment of the topic, focusing on a real, recent, public event, gleaned from the media... reprinting the published article in its entirety – omitting names and identifying references to the YMCA – and providing a few important teaching points for you to share with your staff.

As always, if you need additional guidance on this topic, please call us at 800-463-8546.

The Redwoods Group Insurance Program for YMCAs

AQUATIC ALERT

TOPIC: Hypoxic Training Death

Although the following incident does not involve a Redwoods insured YMCA, we want to impress upon you the role each of us plays in providing a safe environment.

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Teen dies preparing for Navy SEALs

NORTHEAST: 02/28/2008 – Hundreds turned out for a wake held last night for the [community] lifeguard who was pulled unconscious from a [name] YMCA pool on Feb. 18.

The seventeen-year-old [victim] had been practicing underwater breath-holding in anticipation of a Navy SEALs test, [Detective Lieutenant] said.

[Victim], a senior at [name] High School, was enlisted in the Navy and was prepared to ship out after graduation. "He was an example of the high school journey," school principal, [name], said. "He came in a wide-eyed gangly freshman and he found a cause. His cause was serving the country, his cause was protecting others. He went through the whole journey by 17. He came in here a boy and left a man, as any parent would be proud to have."

[Victim] was found by another lifeguard who had gone over to check on him just before the accident. When the lifeguard looked into the water, [victim] waived back up and pointed to his watch, indicating that he was timing himself. "He turned away and, when he turned back," [lifeguard] said, "[Victim] had vomited, there was blood in the water, and he was floating."

[Victim] was first taken to [name] Hospital and later transferred to [name] Medical Center, where he died Feb. 26.

A post mortem examination by the [county] Medical Examiner's Office concluded that [victim] had drowned. The official cause of death was cited as "anoxic-ischemic encephalopathy and acute respiratory distress syndrome."

The U.S. Naval Safety Center warns that underwater breath-holding swim drills can cause blackouts that lead to drowning. An article at www.safetycenter.navy.mil states that trainees who are required to participate in breath-holding exercises must be closely supervised and stay in an observer's direct line of sight.

[Name], executive director of the [name] YMCA, said, "At this time of such sadness and grieving, out of respect for the [victim] family, we're just not prepared to comment right now. We're going to keep the [family] in our prayers."

A service was held at 10 am Friday in [name] Church in [town]. [Victim] will be buried at [cemetery]. The school is planning a memorial service, with the details to be announced later.

“Greatly moving” service for teen who drowned

[Victim] was only 1 1/2 miles from his dream

NORTHEAST: 02/28/2008 – The 17-year-old [name] High School senior had passed a swimming test required to enter the Navy SEAL training program. And over the past eight months, he did enough push-ups, pull-ups, and sit-ups to qualify for the elite unit. The only thing left was a running drill, but he never had a chance to complete it. [Victim] died Monday of drowning, a week after passing out while preparing for SEAL training in a pool at the [name] YMCA.

On Friday after burying his son, [father] said he would complete the run in his son's honor. "I don't think I can do it now," [father], 54, told Newsday. "But give me a month of training and I think I can handle it."

[Victim], a YMCA lifeguard, had been submerged for about two minutes on Feb. 18 when lifeguards saw him face down in the pool, [town] police said. He was on a break and apparently practicing for SEAL training.

[Father] said the family isn't sure whether he was attempting to hold his breath underwater or practicing diving. "It's a mystery," he said. "The only thing we have is theories about him."

Mourners packed [name] Church in [town] on Friday for [victim]'s funeral. Five Navy enlisted men in full dress uniform served as pallbearers. At [name] Cemetery in [town], the pallbearers folded an American flag and presented it to

[father] and his wife, [mother], 45. "It was a greatly moving experience for me," [father] said. "We're just trying to make sense of the whole thing, of my son just drifting away from me."

The pallbearers were arranged by [victim]'s Navy recruiter, Petty Officer 2nd Class [name], 35, of [city]. [Recruiter] said [victim] visited his office regularly and couldn't wait to join the Navy in September.

[Victim] was "a good, solid student" who belonged to a modern dance team at [name] High School, said principal [name]. He remembered [victim] as a "wide-eyed freshman" who grew up during his high school years. "Four years later, he had emerged into this strong, mature young man who looked you in the eye and knew where he wanted to go," [principal] said. [Victim] wanted to join the Navy to "do the biggest thing he could do to protect and defend other people," [principal] said. "In his mind, the SEALs were where he could make that grand contribution."

[Father] said his son first showed an interest in joining the military two years ago after listening to his grandfather tell stories from his days in the Navy.

"Before that he was kind of a regular teenager," he said. "But once he chose that, he got focused and became a man overnight."

EAST COAST: 02/05/2008 – [Victim], a 16-year-old member of the [name] Aquatics Club passed out and nearly drowned while preparing for the upcoming state swimming meet at the [name] High School pool. [Victim] reportedly had completed two underwater lengths without breathing and was

on the third lap when the coach and lifeguard recognized that he was no longer moving and extricated him. He began breathing without rescue breathing or CPR, but was sent to the hospital for observation and a thorough examination.

SOUTHEAST: 02/04/2008 – A member of the [name] High School Swim Team nearly lost his life during practice at the [name] YMCA. Reportedly [name] was in the process of a *no-breath* drill that was to consist of swimming 50 yards underwater without taking a breath.

[Victim], age 15, had made the turn and was nearing the end when a teammate and the coach noticed that he had sunk to about six feet below the surface. With help from a lifeguard they got him out of the water where he spontaneously started

breathing again, but went into convulsions. By the time the paramedics arrived 10 minutes later the convulsions had ceased but he was still transported to [name] hospital where he was admitted and held two days for observation.

[Victim] had swum about 300 yards of freestyle, breast stroke, and butterfly to warm up before the *no-breath* drill, which was intended to help prepare him for the upcoming state meet.

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What we know:

- Breath-hold swimming and diving (or hypoxic training) is extremely dangerous - both active (like the three examples above) and passive forms have resulted in deaths in YMCA pools
- The benefits of hypoxic training are theoretical and have never been medically demonstrated – the detriments are real and are well documented
- Warnings against breath-hold training are numerous – all major aquatic authorities denounce or strongly caution against it – The Redwoods Group stance is unequivocal – it should be forbidden in any managed body of water and violators should lose access privileges

What we don't understand:

- Why some coaches and swimmers...
 - cannot accurately make simple cost-benefit calculations – clearly the proven potential cost outweighs any possible theoretical benefit
 - continue to believe without proof that such a practice will be beneficial to their swimming efforts
 - subscribe to the illusionary belief “it won't happen to me”
 - believe that pool or organization rules against specified practices are meant only for the general public and not for them
- Why so many pool operators continue to allow the practice

What must be remembered:

- By swimmers and coaches...
 - The dangers of breath-hold swimming and diving are challenges that cannot be conquered with any certainty – you may win many times, but a single loss may be all you get
 - Hypoxia is a very deceptive foe – you don't know that you are losing until you have lost
 - the young man above whose death is recorded indicated to the lifeguard by pointing to his watch that he was fine shortly before he was found unconscious
 - one of the historic deaths in a YMCA pool was to a hypoxia training coach
- By those who manage bodies of water...
 - There are people who will insist on participating in either active or passive hypoxic training – you may not be able to stop their behavior but you can stop them from doing it in your water
 - If you don't stop such behavior in your managed body of water and someone dies...
 - they are dead and feel nothing ... and don't have the opportunity to regret
 - you only wish you were dead, feel horrible ... and have the rest of your life to regret
 - you and your association may even be liable for your actions or lack thereof

– DON'T TAKE THE RISK –
BAN ALL FORMS OF HYPOXIC TRAINING IN ANY BODY OF WATER THAT YOU MANAGE.
BE DILIGENT IN RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING ANY SUCH BEHAVIOR.
PROTECT YOUR SWIMMERS AND YOUR LIFEGUARDS.

Please call us at 800-463-8546 to discuss this or any other risk management safety tip, or visit our web site at www.redwoodsgroup.com to learn more about YMCA risk management related issues.

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