TOPIC: Aquatic Personal Protective Equipment

Lifesaving was once a matter of luck, not a trainable technique that has been fined tuned for maximum effectiveness. We now teach rescue techniques only with certain equipment. This equipment is essential both to protect the user as well as to save the victim. Equipment use is not optional in today’s standards of lifeguarding. It is as much to ensure proper rescuer performance as it is to provide appropriate rescuer safety.

**Tube**

The tube provides the rescuer with protection and prevention from sinking. It also provides the victim with buoyancy and prevents the lifeguard from having to fully support the victim’s weight.

- The tube must be in possession of the on-duty lifeguard at all times, no exceptions!
- The strap should be worn by the lifeguard and gathered to prevent catching on the chair during exit.
- The tube can be used as a barrier for the life guard in the event of an emergency (i.e. keeps the guard in control, keeps the victim away from the lifeguard, supports 4 to 5 victims’ heads above the static water line).

**Mask Gloves**

The mask protects the lifeguard from ingesting vomit or other bodily fluids. Gloves give the rescuer protection from blood borne pathogens and give the victim assurance that their rescuer will not panic and quit before the rescue is complete.

- Mask and gloves should always be with the guard, preferably in a fanny pack.
- Virtually all drowning and near drowning incidents involve bodily fluids, especially vomit, which has the potential to be expelled into the guard’s mount if they do not utilize a mask.
- It is unlikely that the guard will use these protective devices if they are not readily available, so encourage them to wear the fanny pack at all times, even when they are on-site but not actively scanning. This will ensure they are prepared if they have to respond to an emergency off the pool deck.

**Training**

Every lifeguard is required to be certified, but your facility should take extra precautions into consideration.

- Conduct training that focuses specifically on PPE utilization and practice [Redwoods Institute](http://www.redwoodsgroup.com).
- During training, “create” bodily fluids using fake blood and Alka-Seltzer in order to prepare your guards and help them adapt to encountering this visual.

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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](http://www.redwoodsgroup.com) to learn more about YMCA risk management issues.