Lifeguard In-Service Trainings

Ongoing trainings that are scheduled, and thoroughly documented, are an essential part of maintaining an effective aquatics staff. A well-designed in-service training program will not only help your lifeguards become better prepared, but it will actively engage them in what it means to be a lifeguard. It will instill the values of responsibility, care and professionalism into your team so that they are motivated to do their best.

Whether it’s more consistent DROP Drills that every guard needs, or specific, remedial training to address a particular guard’s needs—in-service training is a necessary component of a culture of safety in and around the water.

Here are some items to consider:

**How to Prepare for Your In-Service Training**

There are a few things that you should consider when planning and scheduling your in-service training for the year:

1) **Know what resources are available.** We offer resources on our website to support your in-service training. Our series of aquatic shorts are 1-2 minute refreshers on a variety of aquatic safety topics that can be shared during staff meetings, or used as part of your in-service training. 2) **Understand your water.** Even if your lifeguards have responded effectively to a crisis—this is an opportune time to retrain all staff on safety protocol, and highlight what was done well, and what could have been done more efficiently. 3) **Check your in-service training schedule.** It’s important to create an in-service schedule to map out trainings for the entire season/year. Your schedule will also provide a way to easily identify guards that are due for re-training. 4) **Document when a lifeguard has failed an exercise.** Remember to thoroughly document all training to gauge whether more training, remediation or dismissal from lifeguard duties may be necessary. 5) **Know your lifeguards.** Understand your guards’ ability to handle an emergency situation with confidence and proficiency. It’s not always easy to confront adult members about safety issues or bring up safety concerns with other staff. Be sure your lifeguards have the physical, mental and emotional capacity to serve in this role.

**8 Basic Components of Training**

Before reviewing some specific topics, it is helpful to visit some basic principles which will help you to ensure an effective training program:

1) **Schedule your trainings for the whole year,** and communicate agendas to your guards in advance to allow them time to prepare questions/thoughts. 2) **Offer multiple opportunities to attend trainings** so all guards have the chance to participate. Develop a make-up plan for anyone who is unable to attend. 3) **Take trainings beyond conditioning and back boarding.** 4) **Keep records of the trainings,** including attendance and topics covered. 5) **Ask guards for feedback,** including asking them where they can use more support/practice/education. 6) **Design trainings with ALL possible scenarios in mind,** (e.g. one guard on deck, half-staff weekends, early morning adults, or after-school children). 7) **Allow experienced lifeguards to lead trainings** to help them feel invested, and to reinforce their skills. 8) **Be sure to offer positive feedback** and encouragement, as well as constructive criticism where appropriate.

**Training Topics to Consider**

**Emergency Action Plan Drills**

- Practice your EAP bi-annually (at minimum) from start to finish, keeping different scenarios and potential variables in mind.
- Practice identifying the victim, entering the water for a rescue, giving verbal commands to a crowd, retrieving and using the AED/oxygen, and communicating with law enforcement.
- Include all staff that may be involved if an emergency occurs. This includes non-lifeguarding staff—front desk employees, counselors, leadership, etc.

**Enforcing Rules and Policies**

- Practice difficult scenarios with your lifeguards so that they feel empowered and prepared to confront adults, or large groups of people with assertiveness and confidence.
- Role play conversations between the guard and a member who may want to make an exception to the extended breath holding rule, skip the swim test or challenge the guard’s authority. Discuss ways for guards to enforce rules appropriately.

**Recognizing Medical Events and Extended Breath Holding**

- Remind guards to be vigilant, to scan and to take action when necessary.
- Educate guards on how to look for signs of extended breath holding like hyperventilating, using a stopwatch to measure time under water, or the use of weights.
• Encourage lifeguards to identify distressed swimmers who may be clutching their chest, moving in an irregular way, stopping in the middle of the pool, floating with very little movement, and etc.

**DROP Drills**

• Conduct random DROP drills when guards are on duty to test their awareness and responsiveness.

• DROP drills are one of the trainings that we highly recommend implementing into a regular schedule.

• You can read our comprehensive guide on how to conduct DROP Drills at your organization.

**Effective Guard Rotations**

• Ensure your lifeguards understand that they are still on duty during rotation.

• Remind guards to “investigate in” and “investigate out” as they enter and exit the pool area, carefully scanning the pool prior to and following the rotation.

**Lifeguard Zones**

• Involve your lifeguards in the zone mapping of your pool, and discuss which area of the pool each guard is responsible for. This gives the lifeguards a specific area to focus on during their shift. By being involved in the zone mapping, lifeguards will know what areas to focus on in each zone.

• Discuss whether it's better for them to stand or sit in the elevated stand, sun-glare, blind spots, which activities will take place in each zone, and how zones change when lifeguard numbers change.

**Equipment Use**

• Practice AED application with expired pads.

• Ensure that each kit has appropriate tools (e.g. towel, razor, and duct tape).

• Highlight the importance of using inspection logs consistently.

We encourage everyone to draft, plan, and understand the value of in-service trainings. If you have questions on in-service trainings at your facility, please reach out to your Redwoods Consultant.

**Sample In-Service Trainings**

One of our customers has provided some examples of their in-service trainings. They develop their trainings based on current trends, audit results or topics that their staff need to improve on. They have also provided an example of their corrective action form if an employee fails an exercise or exam. Please feel free to use these resources and share widely.

Sample Victim Recognition Training
Sample Lifeguard Rotation Training
Sample Corrective Action Form