

Open Water Swimming provides athletes with a great challenge and allows them to experience a different environment to the swimming pool. It is however a less controllable environment than a swimming pool, so we wanted to share some good practice on risk management and risk assessments with you. Clearly we can't control everything (e.g. weather, water quality), but preparing a good risk assessment and plans and keeping track of these will help to reduce risks. We're covering the high level details for a risk assessment, normal operating procedures and emergency action plans.

## 1. Risk Assessment



Your risk assessment should consider the venue, start and end time, number of athletes, number of volunteers, location of first aid kit and first aider and other key information. You need to keep it up to date, as sometimes circumstances may change.

Your risk assessment should also include descriptions of any hazards or risks you have identified or can think of. These can include (but there may be others):

- Low water quality (e.g. e-Coli/ other bacteria)
- Low water temperature
- Tide or poor water conditions (e.g. swell/ wind)
- Conflict with other users (other swimmers/ boats)
- Underwater hazards
- Course
- Swim start and exit
- Swimmer identification
- Risk of drowning
- Medical conditions of swimmers
- Safety boats or kayaks.

In each case, you should evaluate if it is a high, medium or low risk. If you think it is high or medium risk, you should plan what you can do to reduce the risk. For example, swimmer identification – you might use different color hats to identify the swimmers. If you don't have the required knowledge to take action to reduce the risk, you should identify who has – e.g. checking water quality. In an open water environment, a local authority or environment agency checks water quality and will share this information with you. If it's not possible to reduce the identified risks to a suitable level, you may need to re-plan.

**2. Normal Operating Procedures** describes how the activities are managed in normal circumstances (non-emergency). This might course maps, counting swimmers in and out of the water, supervising swimmers in the water.

- You should produce a course map. Tools like Google maps are helpful– you can download an aerial view of many locations, to allow you to show the entry and exit points, direction of the swim, where to place turn buoys and markers. This is helpful for briefings with swimmers, volunteers and boats.

- If necessary, you may need to prepare alternate course plans
- You should list out all people involved - number of swimmers, volunteers (and the roles they are assigned).

**3. Emergency Action Plan** describes how foreseeable incidents will be managed. Potential incidents may include a missing swimmer, a panicking, injured or unconscious swimmer, and a course evacuation.

Hopefully you will never need to use it, but its good practice to have a



documented plan, which outlines the key contact details and actions required for an emergency.

Having a very clear plan (maximum 1-2 pages), which is easily accessible will help. Your plan should include the following information:

- The full address of your location (include GPS co-ordinates if possible – you'll find these on Google maps)
- Location of nearest telephone
- Location of the nearest first aid person (this could also be the lifeguard)
- Key contact telephone numbers
- List of actions to take
  - Who will call the emergency services? (Include the number for the local emergency services)
  - Name of the person who will issue the instruction to clear the water if necessary
  - Name of the first aider who will respond to any injuries
  - Name of the person who will liaise with the lifeguards
  - Name of the person designated to meet the ambulance/ emergency services
  - Name of the person/ people to take charge of a course evacuation
  - Designated contacts to take reports from athletes, coaches and members of the public if required
  - Name of the person in overall charge of the Emergency Action Plan. (This person normally follows up with Special Olympics to complete guidelines for reporting incidents).

### **Record Keeping**

We recommend keeping track of temperatures (water and air), water quality details, times of swims and any issues that come up during events or training.

### **Additional information:**

- ✓ Your local environment agency may be able to share information on water quality (they may update their website or twitter account)
- ✓ National Governing Bodies for Swimming and Triathlon websites frequently share copies of plans and are a useful starting point.