Public Swimming Pools Supervision Swimming Program

Program Overview

The supervision of young children at public aquatic facilities is an ongoing issue of concern for operators and owners of public aquatic facilities in Western Australia. There is often a misconception by parents that the supervision of young children is the sole responsibility of lifeguards. With lifeguards employed on a 1:100 ratio, it is unrealistic for parents to expect lifeguards to provide the constant and direct supervision that is needed for every young child in the facility at all times. Although lifeguards are present, the responsibility of supervision of children still rests with parents and carers.

As a result of coronial recommendations and following the evaluation of PoolWatch a public supervision and safety project at Beatty Park, the Royal Life Saving Society – WA Branch, worked in consultation with the Leisure Institute of Western Australia Aquatic (LIWA) and aquatics industry professionals to develop the Watch Around Water program.

This program draws on statistical and anecdotal evidence pertaining to the incidence of injury of young children in the absence of adequate parental supervision in public aquatic facilities. Prior to Watch Around Water, no program existed at a state level addressing parental supervision levels in public aquatic facilities.

The aims of the Watch Around Water program are to:
- Provide state-wide supervision standards and practices at public aquatic facilities
- Increase lifeguards skills in addressing parents on aquatic centre supervision requirements
- Raise awareness of, and provide knowledge to parents of what constitutes appropriate levels of supervision of children
- Increase the proportion of parents who effectively supervise their children in public aquatic facilities
- Reduce the number of incidents of drowning and near-drowning and associated injury at public aquatic facilities in Western Australia

The Watch Around Water package consists of five elements:
- Aquatic Facility Centre Policy
- Public Education
- Professional Development
- Environmental Analysis
- Accreditation

The Watch Around Water program was launched on the 20th January 2005 by the Western Australian State Coroner Alistair Hope and was piloted in 15 centres throughout metropolitan and regional WA and one centre in NSW. The 2005/2006 program included 43 centres from WA, three from NSW and two in QLD.

Evaluation of the 2005/2006 campaign

The evaluation of the 2005/2006 program was structured similarly to the pilot with pre and post surveys conducted in each participating centres. Due to the variation in the opening times of centres and the date of commencing the program, not all centres completed pre surveys.
Public Supervision Safety Surveys

Respondent understanding of appropriate supervision of young children remained relatively constant when compared with evaluation results from the pilot.

Approximately 90% of respondents identified supervising your child as an important way to prevent young children aged between 0 and 5 from drowning in the post survey. However, when asked what the most important way to prevent young children from drowning is, only 57.3% identified supervision exclusively.

The overwhelming majority of respondents in the post survey (74.8%) identified adequately supervising a young child aged three around water as keeping them within arms reach. This is an increase of 13% compared to the responses from the pilot. For children aged eight, 50% of respondents identified keeping them where they are visible as adequate supervision. This is a similar response rate to the pilot.

Respondents viewing and understanding of Watch Around Water was similar to the responses recorded in the pilot.

There was an increase in the number of respondents who recognised the Watch Around Water logo compared to the pilot (59.1% as compared to 48%). Approximately 60% of respondents were able to recall campaign messages including age and supervision requirements and slogans on campaign resources.

Logos and posters were the most recognised promotions, 29.9% and 28.4% respectively. Of all the promotions, posters were viewed by respondents as the most effective (29.8%).

53.4% of respondents felt that the campaign was successful in encouraging parents to safely and responsibly supervise their children at all times.

Industry Forum/ Centre Interviews

The number of centres involved and their locations made interviews with individual centre managers difficult, therefore an industry forum was conducted to provide centres with the opportunity to give feedback on the program and its future directions.

The forum provided an overview of the season identifying the best aspects of the program the challenges faced by centres and initiatives that would lead to the improvement of the program.

Feedback received during the forum centred on training and the further development of conflict resolution skills, especially for younger staff, and giving the program a higher profile within the community.
**Recommendations**
The following recommendations were made in response to the results of the public surveys and feedback from the industry forum.

**Recommendation 1: Lifeguards**
Professional development training should focus on conflict resolution skills in how to deal with difficult parents, especially for younger lifeguards.

**Recommendation 2: Public Profile**
Increase advertising and the promotion of the program to give it a higher profile within the community.

**Recommendation 3: Resources**
Review and update resources. Consider the development of new resources for use in centres, especially for those currently not able to use all available campaign material.

**Recommendation 4: Preparation**
Adequate time needs to be given for training and development of aquatic centre staff prior to program commencement within participating centres.

**Recommendation 5: Participating pools**
Increase the number of public pools in regional WA participating in the program.

**Recommendation 6: Evaluation**
Review current evaluation methods and consider the use of performance audits. Begin evaluation earlier to enable all pools, especially regional pools, to be part of the evaluation process.

**Interstate Centres**
The success of the program in WA has created significant interest from aquatic facilities in the Eastern states as currently there is no program that addresses this area of concern in these areas. The components of the developed package are transferable, but slight modifications will always need to be made depending on aspects such as pre-existing policies, state legislation and the extent of need determined by near-drowning/near-miss incidents in each region.

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