

SAFETY OFFICER: (701.12)

The Safety Officer is an extremely important assignment. In the era of “Risk Management” this assignment should not be overlooked nor trivialised. It is vitally important to the success of the event and for the well being of all Swimmers, Coaches, Officials and the Organizing Committee. This is a key role for a key person.

What to look for in a Safety Officer?

Look for an individual who:

-  Has specialized skills in recognizing risks and dangers.
-  Can make suggestions keep these risks to an absolute minimum.
-  Can make an objective recommendation to the Referee regarding the “Go – No Go” decision before and during the event.
-  Can adapt to rapidly changing situations regarding the event.

Individuals with experience in Police, Fire Rescue or Beach Patrol/Ocean Rescue, Coast Guard or who occupy safety officer roles at their place of employment, may be good candidates for Safety Officer.

In conjunction with the Course Officer, the Safety Officer should carefully inspect the proposed course. The Safety Officer should also study and evaluate the Emergency Action Plan for the event. Items for consideration for the Safety Officer include:

Lake Venue Considerations:

- ∞ What is the source of the water? Underground spring, runoff or river fed? If a river - is it fast or slow flowing? Does the river originate in an alpine area? This will determine the water temperature. Is there a dam further upstream? You may need to contact the Water Management Authority to ensure that no discharge is scheduled a few days before the swim. Ingress and egress points on the shoreline?
- ∞ Is there a discharge point from the lake? If there is, what is the discharge rate and what current are caused by this discharge?
- ∞ Is the venue subject to sudden flash flooding? What happens to the excess water? Does it overflow or is there an underground channel? This might be indicated by a whirlpool at some point in the lake.
- ∞ What is the depth of the lake? If it is shallow, then the temperature may be reasonably constant. If the lake is deep, there may be thermo-clines with frigid water at the lower levels. What will be the effect of 50 to 100 swimmers and their support craft on the water layers? Will the frigid water come to the surface?
- ∞ What is the condition of the lake's bottom? Is it sandy, muddy, or rocky? Are there any sinkholes? Are there weeds and reeds? Each of these bottom types can create safety issues for the event.

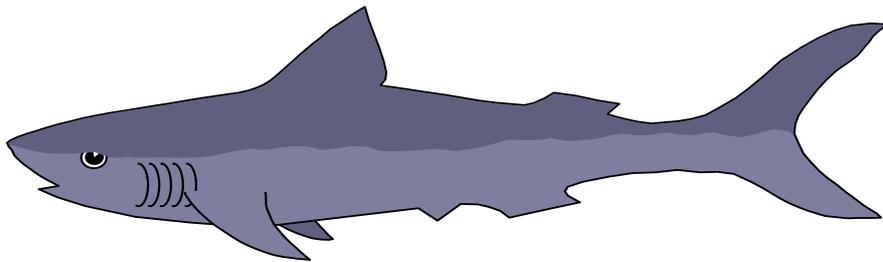
- ∞ How do the swimmers access the venue? Is there safe access to the start and finish areas. Are there additional safe landing areas for swimmers throughout the venue?
- ∞ Is there an access ramp for operations and safety boats?
- ∞ What is the quality of the water? Has the Organizing Committee obtained a clearance from the Health Department? Is it possible to get race day updates as to water quality?
- ∞ Are there any submerged obstacles such as trees, rock outcrops, motor vehicles, traps, or underwater pipes or cables? Could there be a submerged fence line.
- ∞ What is the evacuation plan for the removal of all swimmers from the course? If a sudden electrical storm occurs, are there safe areas on the perimeter of the venue where swimmers and on water volunteers can take shelter. How are injured swimmers evacuated to the nearest medical facilities? Will there be local medical services available at the venue?
- ∞ Is the whole course visible at all times? Is an elevated position available to monitor the complete course at all times? If the swimmers round a natural obstacle such as an island in the middle of the course and they cannot be seen, Can an observer be stationed so that swimmer progress can be monitored at all times?
- ∞ Are there other users of the venue that need to be considered? Commercial, Recreational? Have all potential conflicts been researched and addressed?
- ∞ Is the course adequately defined? Do the markers, buoys or fixed turning points stand out or do they blend into the background? What can be done to ensure a contrast?

The concerns seem limitless and the Safety Officer, Course Officer and Referee need to be fully aware of all considerations.

Beach Venue Considerations?

- ∞ Usually access does not pose a problem however, consideration must be given to possible beach and surf conditions which may make ingress and egress to the water dangerous.
- ∞ Ensure that the Organizing Committee has obtained the required permission to launch and recover watercraft (Surfboards, Kayaks, Jet Skis, Boats) from the venue area.
- ∞ What have been the climatic conditions in the week leading up to the day of the event? A storm thousands of miles away could mean huge swells, large waves and strong winds. What is the weather forecast before, during, and after the event?
- ∞ Are current tide charts available for the day of the event? Is the tide coming in, going out – large or small, all of these can have significant impact for the event.

- ∞ Looking at the beach itself, are there channels, rips, sinkholes, reefs, shallows, sand bars? Is it a patrolled beach? If so approach the local Ocean Rescue department for assistance. Ocean Rescue and Life Guard departments often enjoy supporting open water events.
- ∞ Has the Coast Guard been contacted? The Coast Guard often has detailed charts with known obstacles. The Coast Guard can also assist in events that transit commercial shipping areas. Advanced notice is important.
- ∞ Is the beach subject to unusual numbers of Jellyfish? The time of the year and the prevailing wind may dictate relocation, postponement or even cancellation of the event. The Safety Officer, working in conjunction with the local authorities, can determine the likelihood of large numbers of Jellyfish. Ensure that participants know if Jellyfish are present. Some swimmers can have severe reactions to stings.
- ∞ Virtually every salt water venue is home to a variety of marine life – some of which can be harmful to the participants. Dangerous marine life spotted on or near the course may warrant abandonment of the race. Ensure that the abandonment signal and abandonment procedures are briefed to all participants during the final race instructions.



- ∞ In an ideal situation, the course should be located in an area where all non participating vessels are excluded. Advanced coordination with the local Marine Patrol or Coast Guard may make this a possibility for the event.

It is difficult to predict all the eventualities. The Referee, Course Officer and Safety Officer should assess the venue, think of all as many possible adverse scenarios, and make sure that the Emergency Action Plan and meet operations plans adequately address these possibilities.

What to do?

The Safety Officer shall:

- * Be responsible to the Referee for all aspects of safety related to the conduct of the competition.
- * Check that the entire course, with special regard to the start and finish areas, is safe, suitable, and free of any obstruction.
- * Be responsible for ensuring that sufficient powered safety craft are available during the competition so as to provide full safety backup to the escort safety crafts.

- * Be prepared to provide coaches and athletes a tide/current chart clearly indicating the time of tide changes on the course and showing the effect of tides or current on a swimmer's progress along the course.
- * In conjunction with the Medical Officer advise the Referee if conditions are unsuitable for staging the competition. Be prepared to make recommendations for modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted.

In addition to the Rules, please note that the Safety Officer:

- * Coordinates with the Course Officer on all aspects of the course. Checks the tidal conditions/rates of water flow and be satisfied that the course is safe for the conduct of the event.
- * Checks with the Course Officer that suitable warnings of the event have been passed to all other craft using, or likely to use, any portion of the course.
- * Briefs Swimmers, Handlers, Race Judges and escort safety craft crews on all or any potential safety hazards and the action to be taken should any happen.
- * Ensures that all planned safety and emergency services are in place prior to the start of the race.
- * After consultation with the Medical Officer, confirms to the Referee that all safety requirements have been met.
- * Inspects the swimmers' escort safety craft to ensure that it is suitable for the purpose intended. The size, type and style of the vessels will vary depending on availability and the characteristics of the course. It is highly desirable to have "prop guards" fitted to vessels.

Kayaks/canoes/surfboards/skis can be of use as close-in escort in open stretches of rough water but must always be backed up by a suitable larger craft.

RULES: The following rules relate to the Safety Officer's responsibilities and duties: 701.12

