

Waterfront Safety Design

Top Ten Tips in Action

Certifications on your waterfront mean nothing without common sense and experience. The practical video that accompanies this handout gives clear examples of professional techniques that will help you save lives and prevent injuries. From preventing slips, pinches and burns to building moorings and gates that last, these robust waterfront design principles are what all aquatics staff need to ensure a safe and happy season.

1. Layer lifeguarding

- a. Begin with certified guards and trained lookouts
- b. Insist that all persons—children, staff, families—swim in pairs at all times
- c. Verify buddy counts frequently, i.e., blow buddy-checks

2. Build it beefy

- a. Build everything in your youth program as if children will hang on it, because they will
- b. Use materials like stainless steel clips and nylon rope that last in sun and rain
- c. Overbuild things like moorings that protect your valuable equipment

3. Prevent pinches

- a. Audit past accidents so you can fix the places where young people get hurt
- b. Inspect high-traffic areas and design grips, gangplanks and ladders safely
- c. If you find yourself shouting reprimands about rules, see if you can “design it away”

4. Eye equipment

- a. Inspect PDFs and other safety equipment for wear, tear and UV damage
- b. Keep ring buoys, backboards and other safety equipment untangled and ready-to-use
- c. Wrap shrouds, come-alongs and other high-tension attachments with electrical tape

5. Shield sunshine

- a. Put on SPF 15 or higher sunscreen 15 minutes prior to sun exposure
- b. Put on hats and sunglasses (polarized is best) prior to working in the sun
- c. Protect backboards and other equipment with nylon cloth or old sails sewn to form

6. Instruct in-depth

- a. Post instructional boards on the waterfront wherever needed, such as by boat docks
- b. Post instructional sheets for staff wherever they are needed, such as in boats
- c. Combine homemade signage with commercially produced signage to comply with laws and standards.

7. Check children

- a. Design and use appropriate buddy-check sheets
- b. Design and use appropriate dock-master sheets



- c. Design and use appropriate trip sheets

8. Stop slips

- a. Stick adhesive grip-tape on diving boards, steps and anywhere else participants may slip
- b. Scrub diving boards, steps and other wet surfaces where algae creates a slippery surface
- c. Install artificial turn in slippery places where grip-tape would not work

9. Nurture necks

- a. Install, paint or post "NO DIVING" signs around all shallow swim areas
- b. Verify that all participants in swim meets can perform shallow racing dives
- c. Enforce no diving rules and stay vigilant for participants who might forget the rules

10. Test talents

- a. Verify the swimming abilities of participants and staff at the start of their stay
- b. Practice lost bather drills and backboardings each week
- c. Keep lifeguards focused and remind them, as needed, to scan their area

My own ideas for improving waterfront safety design at my camp, school or other youth-serving organization:

