As you move through this Information Manual you will see this icon. Where this icon appears in the manual a Training Activity is suggested for you to use as part of your Lifeguard induction or in-service training. Feel free to take these suggestions and customise them to be specific to your facility.

For more information about Keep Watch visit:
www.keepwatch.com.au
THE AIM OF THE INFORMATION MANUAL

Keep Watch @ Public Pools is an integrated water safety program which aims to increase awareness of the strategies available to keep children safe when in, on or around public pools and aquatic facilities. The ultimate aim of the program is to eliminate all drowning deaths and near drowning incidents that occur in aquatic leisure centres, public swimming centres and pools. In the short term it is hoping to increase awareness of strategies to keep children safe, change attitudes about what is appropriate safety at public swimming pools and raise awareness about preventative strategies. It also aims to highlight the need for an increase in parental responsibility, rather than relying on pool lifeguards to babysit children.

Keep Watch @ Public Pools has multiple audiences. At one end are the parents and carers who are responsible for the children in their care and at the other are the pool managers who implement safety systems to ensure all who visit the facility are safe, as well as those such as Pool Lifeguards who are charged with ensuring the safety of the facility on a daily basis. As such this program provides a range of resources to help implement safety systems, increase awareness of available strategies and practical tools that people working in facilities can use as well.

In the past nine years, 34 people have drowned at public swimming pools. 41% of these people were children under 10 years of age.

A lack of direct supervision (that is supervision where the parent is undertaking the four elements – preparedness, attention, continuity and proximity) by the parent or carer while a child was in the water has been the main factor in 70% of drowning deaths of children at public pools. Therefore the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program is designed to help facilities engage with parents and carers of children to help them understand what is appropriate supervision at public pools, to ensure children are safe. While lifeguards do a great job at keeping our pools safe, they are not babysitters and cannot provide one-on-one supervision for every patron in the centre. As such they need to find other strategies which they can use to ensure the safety of those patrons with greater vulnerabilities (such as children).

When presenting to staff as part of a training session or on a one-to-one basis about drowning prevention, the following topics are important to include:

- Facts about drowning of children at aquatic facilities (Page 7). This highlights the importance of the message as no pool wants to be part of these statistics.
- Risk factors associated with drowning – detailing the causes of drowning deaths which can be changed or avoided to prevent death or serious injury and include factors related to parents, children and the environment (Page 8).
- KEEP WATCH actions that parents and carers should follow to reduce the risk of children drowning at aquatic facilities (Page 10).
- Suggestions for Staff at Aquatic Facilities – ideas that all aquatic facility staff can incorporate into their work to help prevent drowning deaths (Page 12).
- Community actions – how to work with community groups or individuals to harness community action and prevent drowning and other injuries (Page 15).
- Available Resources (Page 21).
- Directory (Page 21).

It provides a collection of information about risk factors, prevention strategies and types of community actions for the prevention of drowning and should be seen as a guide to helping the staff of aquatic facilities to communicate the importance of drowning prevention to parents and carers of children at aquatic facilities.

The Keep Watch @ Public Pools program is based on sound evidence and is regularly reviewed against domestic and international best practice to ensure its effectiveness. This manual has been designed for the Manager or Supervisor of aquatic facilities to use when talking to staff. Therefore the language in this manual is directed towards the staff member rather than the parent or carer.

HISTORY OF KEEP WATCH @ PUBLIC POOLS

For over 17 years the Keep Watch program has been educating Australian parents and carers on how to keep their children safe when in, on, or around the water in a variety of locations. It also focuses on locations with specific hazards for children where drowning has been more common through the Keep Watch @ Public Pools, Keep Watch @ Bath Time and Keep Watch @ The Farm programs.

The Keep Watch @ Public Pools program is aimed to help aquatic leisure centres, public swimming centres and pools reduce the risk of drowning at these locations. Keep Watch @ Public Pools aims to eliminate all drowning deaths and reduce the number of near drowning incidents in these locations.

The program is targeted at parents and carers of children to help them understand the dangers of leaving their children unattended at the pool. Parents and carers have a responsibility to look after their own children but facilities also have a responsibility to ensure all patrons are safe. While lifeguards do a great job at keeping our pools safe, they are not babysitters and cannot provide one-on-one supervision for every patron in the centre. As such they need to find other strategies which they can use to ensure the safety of those patrons with greater vulnerabilities (such as children).

Keep Watch @ Public Pools is one mechanism to help keep children safe at aquatic facilities by providing a system which educates parents, integrates a culture of safety into the facility and provides a range of resources to undertake these activities.

Drowning Deaths at Public Swimming Pools

In the past nine years, 34 people have drowned at aquatic leisure centres, public swimming centres and pools. 41% of these were under 10 years of age. Across all age groups, males are more likely to drown at public swimming pools than females. Through continued community support of Keep Watch and the delivery of the Keep Watch actions to parents and carers we can reduce the number of children who drown to zero.

With the cost of a drowning death ranging from an estimated $370,000 to $610,000 per incident, drowning deaths at public pools have on average cost the Australian community between an estimated $12.58 million and $20.74 million during this period (1-3).

Figure 1: Drowning Deaths at Public Pools in Australia, by age group (2002-2011)

References:
**OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIES**

**Education/Behaviour Change**

The Keep Watch @ Public Pools program is aimed at changing the behaviour of parents and carers of children at public pools. Through education at the facility and from the lifeguards and staff, parents and carers will recognise the consequences of their behaviour and ultimately improve it.

The diagram below shows the stages of behaviour change for a parent around the issue of supervision of children to prevent drowning. Education and reinforcement of positive behaviours can encourage parents and carers to progress through these stages until they no longer rely on lifeguards to provide supervision.

A key consideration around the strategy of education and behaviour change is to provide information to parents and carers on the importance of supervision of children in an effective way without offending them. An example of this may be educating parents and carers on the developmental stage of their child and therefore the importance of supervision whilst providing them with a brochure or lifeguard information card. You can also provide constructive information to parents on the actions they can take e.g. active supervision, learning resuscitation, swimming and water safety education for children, rather than merely telling them they are doing the wrong thing.

**Changes to Physical Environment**

The physical environment plays a significant role in the level of risk in aquatic facilities. The ability to eliminate, substitute, isolate or engineer changes to the physical environment is preferred over risk rather than just administrative actions such as the use of signs.

Aquatic facilities may like to consider the following as to how they may be used to reduce the risk of drowning or injury in their facility:

- **Safe facility designs may reduce injuries by minimising hazards in the environment and by providing additional layers of protection e.g. appropriate barriers restricting access to water, drowning detection systems**
- **Consider the placement of signs, public address systems and other communication tools at locations where they are most relevant and likely to be seen or heard by the target audience e.g. at entrance to the facility, change rooms, near toddlers pools or play areas**
- **Consider the layout of the facility such as the placement of chairs for parents near areas where children are encouraged to swim or the placement of features such as gardens that may obstruct lines of sight**

**Changes to Management Standards and Practices**

Management standards and practices provide the managers of public pools and aquatic facilities with useful information about the minimum requirements and best practices in the operation of public pools and aquatic facilities.

The Guidelines for Safe Pool Operation (GSPO) is an example of a venue based risk management tool provided as a voluntary guide which assists an operator in satisfying their legislative duties and providing a high standard of care for visitors to their centre.

The Keep Watch @ Public Pools program has been developed in support of GSPO Guideline SU3 Supervision of Children. This Guideline outlines the accepted industry minimum standard on the entry of children to an aquatic facility and expected parental behaviour. The GSPO is regularly updated to reflect the changing expectation of industry with regard to safety and risk management in public pools and aquatic centres.

Management standards and practices can have a significant impact on injury prevention, especially when combined with strong enforcement e.g. Keep Watch @ Public Pools and enforcement of roles of parents and carers, currency with the latest developments in Lifeguard training and practices.

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### Reference

WHY DO CHILDREN DROWN @ PUBLIC POOLS?
Children drown for a range of reasons. The risk factors may be discussion points that Managers or Supervisors can use to highlight drowning prevention strategies to Pool Lifeguards and aquatic facility staff.

Risk Factors Related to Parents and Carers
- Absence or lack of adequate supervision
- Unrealistic expectations of young children’s behaviour and self-control
- False sense of security when each parent or carer mistakenly assumes that the other is supervising the toddler
- Unfamiliar environments - not knowing about and being prepared for risks and hazards
- Parents being unprepared (e.g. leave child to fetch forgotten towel)
- False belief that the presence of another child or children reduces the threat of a child drowning. Other children may not appreciate that a drowning child is in danger. They may assume the child is playing and do not alert adults
- False belief that safety devices such as a buoyancy aids, flotation devices and inflatable pool toys provide adequate protection
- Inability to recognise the signs of a child in difficulty
- Lack of knowledge of Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and/or apprehension to administer
- Complacency at aquatic leisure centres, public swimming centres and pools and therefore not being as vigilant. Assuming that aquatic leisure centres, public swimming centres and pools are safe because Lifeguards are present and supervising the child

Risk Factors Related to the Child
- Babies have limited strength, no judgment or physical coordination to recognise dangerous situations or get themselves out of trouble
- Young children are attracted to water
- A young child is not able to understand the concept of danger and therefore may have difficulty in understanding that water could cause harm
- Children do not understand the consequences of falling into water
- Infants and toddlers generally are not coordinated enough to swim and breathe at the same time, making it difficult to teach them to swim effectively
- Young children who have basic aquatic skills are not water safe or ‘drownproof’, as they may panic or forget their skills in an emergency or unfamiliar environment
- Very young children are susceptible to drowning because they are top heavy (i.e. have a large head in comparison to the rest of their body). A young child leaning forward to look into water or reach for an object easily topples over and drowns even in just a few inches of water
- Drowning is a silent event as children do not usually cry out for help. A drowning child may not cough or splash. A child swallows water, sinks and loses consciousness in less than a minute. Drowning happens quickly and silently
- Illness (e.g. epilepsy)
- Acute injury (e.g. being knocked unconscious)
- Disobeying a parent or carers instructions
- Being attracted to: colourful toys in the pool or floating on water; other children playing in the water; water movement

Risk Factors Related to Aquatic Environments
- Absence of a safety barrier or appropriate distance of separation between shallow water and deep water
- Tempting objects in the water – toys etc
- Steep or slippery entry and exit points
- Submerged objects
- Obstructions to lines of sight impeding close visual contact with a child
- The temperature of the water (e.g. when the temperature of water is different to what the child is used to this may upset or confuse the child)
- Children following parents, carers or siblings into water
Preparedness
Preparedness refers to the state of a parent or carer's readiness to act for specific or unpredictable events.

A parent or carer who is prepared will have items such as swimwear, towels, clothes, flotation aids and pool toys ready when visiting the pool so that their attention may be focused on their child at all times. In all cases, parents or carers should be prepared and dressed for action. That means being dressed ready to enter the water.

Proximity
Proximity refers to the distance of a parent or carer from their child. Keep Watch recognises three degrees of proximity for the supervision of children:

- **Touching** – parents or carers maintain close physical contact with children at all times. This level of close proximity is important for toddlers who lack physical strength and coordination to remain safe within the water.
- **Within reach** – parents or carers remain within arms’ reach of children at all times. This is particularly important for 0 to 5 year olds who may have developed some independence but still lack the strength, coordination and judgment to recognise dangerous situations or get themselves out of trouble.
- **Beyond reach** – parents or carers are beyond the reach of their child. This is appropriate for children aged 6 years or above where other dimensions of supervision such as maintaining constant visual contact are applied appropriately. However, this distance will vary depending on the child, their swimming ability and the environment.

Attention
Attention refers to sensory engagement in the task of supervision. Parents or carers may utilise one or all of their senses in supervision.

An attentive parent or carer may be one that is in the water playing games with their child or sitting on the edge watching and talking to their child. Conversely, an inattentive parent or carer may be sitting away from the pool distracted by their mobile phone or reading a book.

Keep Watch recognises two elements of attention for the supervision of children:

- **Physical (engagement/interaction with child)** – physical contact refers to the use of touch to maintain constant contact with the child. This is dependent on the parent or carer being within arms’ reach at all times and providing continuous supervision as required by Keep Watch @ Public Pools for children aged 5 years and under or non-swimmers.
- **Visual** – visual attention requires parents or carers to maintain visual contact with their child. Visual attention may be constant or intermittent however Keep Watch @ Public Pools requires that for children 10 years old or younger or non-swimmers that parents and carers maintain constant visual contact with children.

The best attention is where there is both physical and visual attention such as a parent or carer in the water playing games and interacting with their child.

Continuity
Continuity refers to the period or sequence of supervision by the parent or carer. As with Proximity, Keep Watch recognises three degrees of continuity:

- **Continuous** – refers to supervision without interruption by the parent or carer as required for children under the age of 10, weak or non-swimmers when they are in or near the water.
- **Intermittent** – refers to supervision that occurs occasionally or at regular intervals as recommended for children aged 11 – 14 who are competent swimmers. The regularity with which a parent or carer needs to check up on their child is dependent on each individual context. For older children in pools that are of a single depth in which the child can stand, the child may need to be checked upon less frequently than a child in a facility where there is more than one pool each of different depth for example. At a minimum, parents or carers should check on their child several times during the course of their visit to the pool.
- **Absent** – refers to a lack of supervision by the parent or carer and is not recommended for children of any age.

What is ‘Active Supervision’ @ Public Pools?
Active Supervision @ Public Pools consists of four key elements:

- **Be Prepared** – Parents/carers should ensure they have everything they need before getting into the water, such as towels and dry clothes.
- **Be Close** – Parents/carers should always be within arms’ reach of their child.
- **All Of Your Attention** – Parents/carers should focus all of their attention on their child and get into the pool and talk and play with them.
- **All Of The Time** – Parents/carers should never leave their child alone in the water, nor should they be left in the care of an older child or the Lifeguard at a public pool.

Training Activity
The supervision needs for each child depends on a range of factors related to both the child and the aquatic environment.

What do you think some of these factors might be in your facility and what level of supervision is required from a parent or carer for children of different ages and swimming abilities?

Remember the 4 elements of supervision – Preparedness, Proximity, Attention, Continuity!
**Keep Watch @ Public Pools Policy**

Children (under 10 years) are not allowed entry unless under active supervision of a person 16 years or older.

Parents and carers should actively supervise their children at all times. As such, they should be dressed ready for action, including unexpected entry to a pool.

**Children 0-5**
For 0-5 year olds and non-swimmers a parent or carer is in the water at all times within arms’ reach of the child. It is best if you are engaging with your child i.e. playing with them, talking to them.

**Children 6-10**
For 6-10 year olds constant active supervision is required. Be prepared to get wet and enter the water with this age group.

**Children 11-14**
For 11-14 year olds it is recommended that parents check up on their child by physically going to the point where they are in or around the water.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

**Responsibilities**
As a Keep Watch @ Public Pools Partner Pool the facility and its staff have a number of responsibilities summarised below:

**Management Responsibilities**
- Use and abide by the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operation (GSPO)
- Actively promote the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program
- Ensure training and qualifications of staff enable them to deliver Keep Watch @ Public Pools messages
- Ensure all staff are aware of and abide by the Keep Watch @ Public Pools policies
- Clearly display all posters, signs and entry requirements
- Ensure CSA’s are regularly played throughout the day—especially in peak hours
- Sign the agreement saying you will undertake the above activities

**Staff Responsibilities**
- Ensure Keep Watch @ Public Pools rules are applied through:
  - Public education by lifeguards to patrons
  - Signage
  - Announcements where possible
  - Professional development of staff
  - Information brochures and cards
- All staff participate in Keep Watch @ Public Pools professional development annually

**Actions**

**Who?**
Everyone has a responsibility to promote Keep Watch @ Public Pools from the time a parent or carer with children arrives in the car park at the facility until they leave the facility. When a parent or carer arrives they should be made aware of the facility’s expectations of them in terms of active supervision i.e. maintaining constant visual contact or being in the water with their child. Where possible if the expectations and Pool Entry Rules are communicated prior to entry then it is more likely that the parent or carer will act appropriately for the duration of their visit. They also have the option of deciding that they do not want to participate. It is also more likely that in the circumstance that a Lifeguard must speak to the parent, they are more receptive to the message as they are aware of the expectation and policy of the facility.

**Staff**
Staff who greet people as they arrive, can identify and inform patrons of their responsibilities around keeping children safe in a friendly and informative manner. This can be facilitated through the use of some of the resources available.

Lifeguards must ensure that the expectations set at the point of entry are enforced once the parent or carer enters the swimming pool area. Consistent application of the Pool Entry Rules is very important in educating users and ensuring the rules are followed. Inconsistency in the application of rules can often be a source of conflict that may have been avoided.

**What and when?**
At the point of entry:
- Advise visitors to their facility that the facility is a Keep Watch @ Public Pools Partner and what it means in terms of parental responsibility for supervision in accordance with the Pool Entry Rules and the Keep Watch @ Public Pools Policy

During their visit:
- Ensure parents are complying with the Pool Entry Rules by actively supervising their children as follows:
  - For 0-5 year olds and non-swimmers a parent or carer is in the water at all times within arms’ reach of the child. It is best if the parent is engaging with their child i.e. playing with them, talking to them
  - For 6-10 year olds constant active supervision is required. The parent or carer should be prepared to get wet and enter the water with this age group
  - For 11-14 year olds it is recommended that a parent or carer check up on their child by physically going to the point where they are in or around the water
- Educate parents about supervision when they do not comply with the Pool Entry Rules and the Keep Watch @ Public Pools Policy by talking to them and providing them with a Keep Watch @ Public Pools Brochure or Lifeguard or Swim School Information Card
- Correct behaviour when you see someone not abiding by the Keep Watch @ Public Pools Policy and Pool Entry Rules

**How?**
The “How” of implementing the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program is largely dependent on the individual facility but should incorporate the following common elements:

- **Pool Entry Rules**
The Pool Entry Rules should be displayed at the entrance to the facility and be visible to patrons prior to paying for admission. You might also like to display them on entry to the car park. Where possible the staff member responsible for greeting customers and taking admission should take the time to educate parents or carers with children about Keep Watch @ Public Pools – their responsibilities as a parent or carer and the responsibility of the facility. For example:
  “Are you aware that we are a Keep Watch Partner Pool and require parents of children under 5 to be in the water with their children?” – For children that appear to be under 5
  “Are you aware that we are a Keep Watch Partner Pool and require parents to closely watch their children at all times?” – For children that appear to be aged 6 – 10.
  “We are a Keep Watch Partner Pool and ask that you please regularly check up on your children to ensure their safety during your visit today” – For adults accompanying children over 10 years of age.

This is not only good customer service but sets up an expectation upon entry.

A parent or carer’s response to this question may lead to further follow up information being provided such as Keep Watch @ Public Pools Brochure or further explanation of Keep Watch @ Public Pools program if time permits.

Staff should not rely on signs to inform parents and carers of their responsibilities as part of Keep Watch @ Public Pools. Rather, staff should proactively inform parents and carers or direct them to signs or resources that outline the responsibilities of parent or carers.

Signs should be seen as ways to enhance and reinforce the message and as such should be placed at key locations (e.g. toilet doors, where children are playing) and should not be coupled with advertising signage or other things which could distract from the sign.

- **Lifeguards**
Lifeguards play a key role in the implementation of Keep Watch @ Public Pools. Their role is both as educators and, if circumstance requires, enforcers of the program. If education is effective it is anticipated that the need to enforce the program is reduced or in the very least made easier by an awareness of a parent or carer’s responsibilities.

**The Keep Watch @ Public Pools policy and the ages within it represent minimum standards that Royal Life Saving expects of public pools however Royal Life Saving encourages pools to adopt a higher standard.**

Keep Watch @ Public Pools is more than just putting up signs and handing out brochures at your aquatic facility.
- Educate
A key principle of modern Lifeguarding is that of incident/injury prevention as opposed to emergency response. Lifeguards should be communicating and educating patrons all the time. Communication with parents and carers should include reinforcement of the Keep Watch @ Public Pools policy of active parental supervision. As with the examples at the point of entry, this can be done as part of a greeting or when informing parents and carers where to swim with their children.

For example; “Hi - it’s a great day for a swim. The program pool is currently open for parents to play with their children” - for children that appear to be under 5.

“Hi - it’s a great day for a swim. Lane 1 is currently open for kids to play. There are seats along that side of the pool which gives you a good view of your child in the water” - for children that appear to be aged 6 – 10.

“Hi - it’s a great day for a swim. Lane 1 is currently open for kids to play. There are seats along that side of the pool which gives you a good view of your child in the water or if you’re going off to have a swim yourself, please check on them every so often to make sure they’re ok” - for adults accompanying children over 10 years of age.

Inform
There will be occasions where parents will not comply with Keep Watch @ Public Pools. At these times it is important that Lifeguards and aquatic facility staff in the first instance attempt to inform the parent as to what is expected by the facility as a Keep Watch @ Public Pools Partner. Information Cards are a useful resource for Lifeguards in these situations.

Information Cards may be used in the following ways:
- Handled to parents or carers found not adequately supervising a child or to welcome new people to the centre;
- Used as a warning for parents and carers;
- Given to swim schools using your facility to hand out; and
- Used to educate parents or carers on the importance of correct supervision techniques.

When an information card is used, the Lifeguard should also communicate the reason why. The following are examples of ways to use the Information Cards as a warning for parents and carers.

- “Excuse me sir/madam, I’ve noticed that your young child is in the water without you. We require that all parents of young children be in the water with their children as part of the Keep Watch program. This card gives some information about the program and I’d ask could you please be in the water with your child for the remainder of their swim” - for children that appear to be under 5.

- “Excuse me sir/madam, I’ve noticed that you’re unable to see your child from where you are. We require parents to be able to watch their children at all times as part of the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program. This card gives some information about the program and I’d ask could you please move to a seat that gives you a better view of your child” - for children that appear to be aged 6 – 10.

You could even help them find a seat to help facilitate the process as long as it does not take you away from your other duties.

Should the parent fail to comply with the direction of the Lifeguard, the Lifeguard should ask the parent or carer to amend their behaviour.

For example;

- “Excuse me sir/madam, for your child’s safety I can ask that you please be in the water with your child for the remainder of their swim otherwise I will need to remove your child from the water” - for children that appear to be under 5.

- “Excuse me sir/madam, for your child’s safety can I ask that you please take a seat where you can see your child for the remainder of their swim otherwise I will need to remove your child from the water” - for children that appear to be aged 6 – 10.

Should the parent or carer ignore these requests, the Lifeguard should seek help from the Manager or Supervisor on Duty to address the parent/carer and/or remove the child from the water.

Conflict Management
Conflict arises when there are differing views, opinions, ideas or interests between two or more people. Keep Watch @ Public Pools has the potential to create conflict where the views of the Lifeguard or aquatic facility staff member differs from that of the parent or carer in regard to what is appropriate active parental supervision. The issue of conflict and anti-social behaviour within the aquatic and recreation industry is becoming increasingly significant and widespread. There are growing concerns with regard to the potential risk to aquatic staff posed by aggressive or non-cooperative patrons. Royal Life Saving offers further training opportunities to enhance the skills of aquatic staff in assessing and predicting behaviours to address and resolve conflicts. Contact Royal Life Saving in your State or Territory for further information.

Managing conflict is a key competency for performing a Lifeguard’s duties however it can be a challenging skill to acquire. An important aspect of conflict management is ensuring you are actively listening to the person you are talking to. This means making eye contact, nodding to show you are listening to what the person is saying and waiting for the other person to finish speaking before speaking yourself. Remember to always be courteous.

Other conflict management techniques include:
- Transform problems into creative opportunities
- Build rapport
- Apply strategies to attack the problem and not the person

Pool Managers should regularly conduct training in conflict management with all staff.

Training Activity
The examples above are just some ways to educate parents of the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program. Spend 5 minutes brainstorming ways to communicate the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program to parents and carers of children of different ages during their visit to your facility. Remember to make this activity specific to your facility and the processes that you have in place to communicate with patrons.

REMEmber
Lifeguards can educate patrons only when the patrons listen. Lifeguards must:

- Conduct themselves in a mature and professional manner
- Show friendliness and concern for patrons
- Be consistent in enforcing policies
- Show politeness, confidence and some flexibility in correcting behaviour or responding to emergencies
TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGING YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

Generating media interest can be a lot easier than everyone imagines. Presenting the right information in a well written press release is the first step in capturing the attention of your local media. The following tips and guidelines are designed to make pitching story ideas to the media a simple process and one that will maximise your aquatic facility's media opportunities.

The Press Release

A press (or media) release is the usual way to present a story idea.

The release is the simple outlining of key information and facts that journalists and editors will read. From that, they will decide whether they want to follow up the idea and turn it into a story.

In many cases the release will be published almost verbatim, so a well written and well presented release can be a very attractive option, especially to a newspaper with limited time or resources.

Choose Carefully

Bombarding your local media with a continual stream of releases about every conceivable idea is not only bad practice but will result in your releases being ignored. Choose your ideas carefully and always ask yourself "is it important for the community to know this information?"

If you can honestly answer "yes", then you have a good foundation for your story being accepted.

Eight Ways to Assess a Story Idea

Newsworthiness determines the likelihood of a story getting "up". Ask yourself the following questions to assess the newsworthiness of your story. You should be able to answer yes to at least one of these questions.

The more yes's, however, the greater the likelihood of a story being covered by the media.

Five W's and an H

The simplest way to think about your release is by using Who, What, When, Why, When and How. By answering these questions, you will be covering all the bases.

Example: Who are you? Who is your facility? Where is your facility? What is the purpose? What has it been used for? Where was it held before? Why is it being held? Where was it held before? Why is it being held? Why has it moved? When is it happening? When did it happen? When is the next phase? How did it come about? How is it different? How are people impacted? And so on...

Writing the Lead

The lead sentence is the most important part of the release. With so many releases coming across the desks of media outlets every day, you have to get to the most important information in that first paragraph.

Often, journalists won’t read past it, unless you capture their attention and provide a reason to continue reading. Make the first paragraph good enough to be read in isolation. Even if the rest of the article isn’t read, you have made your point.

When writing the lead, keep in mind:

• It is the first time this event/occurrence has happened in the community?
• Is it relevant or related to other events happening at the time?
• Does the issue impact your local community?
• Does the story shed light on a complex issue?
• Does the story contain a compelling human interest angle?
• Does the story contain practical information for people in the community?
• Does the story fit into a topic that the media automatically write about, such as a holiday observance, an annual event, or a political issue?
• Does it involve well known people, institutions or events?

There are other factors news outlets will consider. But perhaps the over-arching consideration is: "Is it new?" If not, "how is it different from what’s gone before?"

Five W's and an H

The simplest way to think about your release is by using Who, What, Where, Why, When and How. By answering these questions, you will be covering all the bases.

Example: Who are you? Who is visiting your centre? Who is your facility targeting? What is the program/s issue? When is it happening? Where is it being held? Why is it being held? Why has it moved? When is it happening? When did it happen? When is the next phase? How did it come about? How is it different? How are people impacted? And so on...

Fleshing it out and the 'Inverted Triangle'

The body copy simply expands on the information already presented but there is a way to do this journalistically. Newspaper articles are written in an "inverted triangle" style, i.e. the most important information is at the top and the information decreases in importance as the story continues.

The idea is that a reader can read the first few paragraphs and get the essential information. Journalists write this way, they read this way and they think this way. Therefore, even a press release, should be presented this way. Also, when editors need to make space, they often edit from the bottom up i.e. cut paragraphs from the final paragraph upwards. They assume that all the key information is in the top few paragraphs and that the final paragraphs are simply filler.

Structure your release so that the essential information is presented early and leave any important background or history until the end.

Boilerplate

A boilerplate is a set sentence or paragraph about you and your services and partnerships. It may simply contain a few key messages but is generally an approved statement that is attached to all correspondence. Include a boilerplate as the final sentence or paragraph in your press release.

The Keep Watch @ Public Pools boilerplate follows:

"The Royal Life Saving Keep Watch @ Public Pools program aims to eliminate all drowning deaths and near drowning incidents that occur in aquatic leisure centres, public swimming centres and pools across Australia."

Call to Action

Similar to a 'call to action' that gives the public an opportunity to do something, a call to action in a press release gives a journalist the opportunity to contact you for more information or to arrange an interview.

Clearly place your contact details at the end of your release stating that you are available to give more information or to coordinate media enquiries.

The example quote, by an authoritative person, gives authenticity and prominence to the piece, and paves the way for an eye catching headline (e.g. 'Royal Life Saving and Main Street Aquatic Centre call for greater parental responsibility'). It also localises the issue by introducing a statistic that is relevant to the area.

The journalist or news editor doesn’t have to go far to get a very good sense of what is happening and that it is relevant to the region.

Don’t Take Rejection Hard

Not all press releases get published. Breaking news, competing stories, a recent similar story and so on are all reasons why yours didn’t make the cut. Don’t despair! Critique your own press release to assess how you can improve it next time.

Format

Branding is vital. It also looks professional and immediately shows the media recipient where the release is from. Your release should be on your aquatic facility letterhead with ‘Media Release’ or ‘Press Release’ written at the top of the letterhead. Make sure you insert the date.

Releases also use a ‘dateline’: at the start of your first sentence write the city/town from where you are writing followed by the day. For example: SYDNEY, THURSDAY: A new swimming program designed to dramatically increase children’s safety is being launched next week at Main Street Aquatic Centre.

Sending the Release and Following Up

Newspapers will usually have contact details somewhere near the front of their publication. For radio and television you can easily search their website. It is always best to contact the publication, explaining that you would like to send a release and ask for the correct email address or fax number as media outlets rarely list their news desk details. Ask for the news desk’s phone number at the same time. Email the final release as a PDF.

Unless it is breaking news, you will almost always need to follow up the release with a phone call. Be prepared to pitch the story to a reporter. Send the release early in the morning and follow up later that day. Be aware of deadlines and production schedules. Avoid calling after 4pm. This will be different depending on the publication but is a good rule of thumb, especially for daily news services.

Sample Media Release

Use the releases below as templates. Customsise the release you wish to use by adding your contact details and adjusting the information within them (the highlighted items). Use your organisation’s own logo. Or use them as a guide to create your own media release. If you send a media release, remember to follow up with a phone call to find out if more information is required.

If you do not use the following template but will be quoting Royal Life Saving please run it by the media contact in your local State or Territory Branch. See the back cover of this Information Manual for contact details.

There is an electronic template available for you to download and modify from the www.KeepWatch. com.au website.
Who’s responsible for supervising your child at Main Street Aquatic Centre?

SYDNEY, FRIDAY: Main Street Aquatic Centre and Royal Life Saving have joined together to introduce a new water safety awareness program designed to improve children’s safety through improved parental supervision at the Centre.

According to figures from Royal Life Saving, 34 people drowned in public pools over the last 9 years. Almost half the people who drown or are injured in Australia’s public pools are children. And in 70% of those child drownings, the main factor is a lack of direct supervision by the parent or carer.

The supervision question, however, is controversial as customers rightly assume that professional Lifeguards are on duty, confusing parents and carers about how vigilant they need to be. Royal Life Saving together with Main Street Aquatic Centre is urging all parents and carers to supervise their children at public pools.

“We need parents to realise that they can’t check their responsibility at the door. Even though Lifeguards are on duty, parents still have a crucial safety role to play. It’s not about shifting responsibility; it’s about keeping children safe,” said Craig Roberts, National Manager Aquatic Risk Management, for Royal Life Saving Society – Australia.

Main Street Aquatic Centre also echoes this sentiment. “Unfortunately a lot of parents don’t realise just how necessary they are. Yes, Lifeguards might be on duty but they might be watching 35 children at the same time. If we want to be able to make certain every child is safe we need parents and carers to take up as much responsibility as possible,” said Bill Citizen, Centre Manager of Main Street Aquatic Centre.

Main Street Aquatic Centre is implementing the Royal Life Saving Keep Watch @ Public Pools program which urges parents or carers of children to take a more active role in the supervision of their children when visiting the Centre. Keep Watch @ Public Pools outlines the different supervision criterion depending on the age or swimming ability of a child. Those criteria are: for a child 0–5 and non-swimmers, a parent or carer needs to be in the water within arms’ reach of the child at all times; for 6–10, that parent needs to be actively supervising at all times and dressed ready to enter the water if necessary; for children 11–15, a parent or carer needs to be checking regularly on their child and be ready to enter the water if necessary.

According to Citizen, a high level of goodwill and understanding is required by both parties. “We don’t want to tell parents how to look after their children. But we do need both parents and lifeguards working together and the Keep Watch @ Public Pools program will allow them to do that seamlessly,” he said.

Contact

Bill Citizen
Centre Manager
Main Street Aquatic Centre
Ph: (XX) XXXX XXXX Mobile: XXXX XXX XXX

Craig Roberts
National Manager Aquatic Risk Management
Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
Ph: (02) 8217 3111 Mobile: XXXX XXX XXX

Press Release
For Immediate Release

[DATE]
KEEP WATCH PROGRAMS

The Keep Watch program has 4 key actions to prevent your child from drowning. These are: Supervise, Restrict Access, Water Awareness and Resuscitate.

These strategies are not to be used in isolation and should form part of a web of strategies. Therefore if one line of defence fails there are more prevention measures working together to prevent your child from drowning.

Keep Watch @ Public Pools Resources

Royal Life Saving provides a number of opportunities for facilities or organisations to include their own branding of Keep Watch @ Public Pools resources. For more information contact your nearest Royal Life Saving Branch.

Please go to www.keepwatch.com.au to view sample images of the resources.

For large quantities discounts may apply. Some orders may attract a postage and handling cost. Translated resources are available. Customised items are available, price on enquiry.

Your logo can be added to any customised resources for no extra charge.
CHILD DROWNING – FACT OR FICTION?

Child drowning is preventable. Unfortunately there are a number of myths about children and water. The aim of this fact or fiction is to give parents the real information about child drowning in order for them to more effectively prevent it.

Fiction: Children are easy to supervise and I do not need to modify my strategies as they age.
Fact: Children develop quickly and at different stages their abilities can change quite rapidly. As children grow they become more mobile and like to explore. This may mean they begin climbing over barriers that are designed to keep them away from water.

Fiction: Children are at a lesser risk of drowning because of their small physical build.
Fact: Young children are at risk because of their physical build. They are ‘top heavy’ and more prone to falling into water due to a lack of balance.

Fiction: Children are aware of the dangers water poses to them and will take care around water.
Fact: Children do not understand or perceive the hazards that water presents to them. They have no real sense of danger and require a high level of supervision.

Fiction: Young children can be left in the supervision of older children.
Fact: Never leave children in the care of older children. Older children may not perceive the amount of danger a young child may be in and may confuse drowning for playing or lack the attention levels needed to supervise correctly.

Fiction: Water needs to be reasonably deep for children to drown in it.
Fact: Children only need a small amount of water to drown in. Water that is deep enough to cover their nose and mouth is enough for a child to drown in.

Fiction: I can leave my child alone in the pool for a few seconds/minutes while I grab something I forgot, or to go to the toilet.
Fact: Drowning can occur in a matter of moments and you should never leave your child without active adult supervision. Ensure you have everything you need before entering the pool.

Fiction: Toddlers are naturally docile and do not like to explore around water.
Fact: Toddlers are a naturally inquisitive group and are attracted to water. Children under 5 years of age are especially at risk because of their natural curiosity about their environment.

Fiction: When children are drowning they will make a lot of noise and cry and call for help.
Fact: This is a common misconception, when children drown it is silent.
FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT THIS MANUAL CONTACT:

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia
Phone 02 8217 3111
E-mail info@rlssa.org.au
Visit www.royallifesaving.com.au

CONTACT ROYAL LIFE SAVING
IN YOUR STATE OR TERRITORY:

ACT  Phone 02 6260 5800
      E-mail act@rlssa.org.au

NSW  Phone 02 9634 3700
      E-mail nsw@royalnsw.com.au

NT    Phone 08 8981 5036
      E-mail nt@rlssa.org.au

QLD  Phone 07 3823 2823
      E-mail admin@rlssq.com.au

SA    Phone 08 8234 9244
      E-mail training@royallifesavingsa.com.au

TAS   Phone 03 6243 7558
      E-mail tas@rlssa.org.au

VIC   Phone 03 9676 6900
      E-mail mail@lifesavingvictoria.com.au

WA    Phone 08 9383 8200
      E-mail info@rlsswa.com.au