

WATER SAFETY REGULATIONS MANUAL

On-Campus Ocean Front & Off-Campus Aquatic Operations

Accreditation Body: American Camp Association (ACA)

Target Standards Focus: PA.1, PA.3, PA.5, PA.6, PA.8, PA.9, PA.12

Primary Context: Natural Bodies of Water (Ocean/Beach)

Document Scope: Comprehensive Camp Aquatics SOP

PART I: ON-CAMPUS OCEAN & BEACHFRONT REGULATIONS

Operating a camp program directly on an open ocean beachfront carries unique risk management considerations. Shifting tides, local marine wildlife, variable underwater geography, and surf conditions mandate strict adherence to specialized aquatic operations workflows.

1.1 Leadership & Staffing Qualifications

- **Waterfront Director (ST.11):** Must be at least 21 years of age, hold a current, nationally recognized Lifeguard Management or Waterfront Supervision credential, and have documented experience managing a natural, open-water beachfront.
- **Ocean Lifeguards (ST.12):** All aquatic staff assigned to beach duties must maintain current lifeguarding credentials that feature specialized waterfront or open-water modules (e.g., American Red Cross Waterfront Lifeguarding or USLA Open Water Lifeguard). Shallow-water or pool-only metrics do not satisfy this standard.

1.2 Supervision Ratios & Dedicated Lookouts (PA.1)

- **Supervision Baseline:** A strict baseline ratio of **1:10** (Lifeguard to Campers) must be actively maintained at the shoreline during all wading, body-boarding, or swimming sessions.
- **Designated Global Lookout:** For any swimming assembly exceeding 10 campers, at least one certified lifeguard must be positioned as a dedicated, dry-land "Lookout." This individual focuses entirely on high-level macro-scanning. They are prohibited from instructional duties, direct water play, or localized guarding to preserve an uncompromised global view.

1.3 Daily Environmental Site Assessment (PA.8, PA.9)

Before any participant enters the water, the Waterfront Director must perform a complete structural evaluation of local marine conditions and log the findings:

- **Tidal & Current Analysis:** Track high/low tide windows, observe rip current risks issued by the National Weather Service, and measure localized breaking surf height.
- **Shoreline & Substrate Sweep:** Walk the shallow wade lines to inspect for dynamic drop-offs, sharp shell deposits, hazardous debris, or biological risks (e.g., jellyfish blooms, stingrays).

- **Water Quality Check:** Confirm that no active public health beach advisories or harmful algal blooms (HABs) are reported for the sector.

1.4 Beachfront Boundary Matrix

Zone Designator	Skill Classification	Maximum Depth	Physical Boundary System
Shallow Zone (Red)	Non-Swimmers / Beginners	Non-Swimmers: Knee-deep maximum. Beginners: Chest-deep maximum.	Brightly colored shore flags on dry sand marking lateral lines; heavily anchored, colored perimeter buoys.
Deep Zone (Blue)	Advanced Swimmers	Overhead depth up to safety line.	Distinctly colored outer buoy perimeter line. No camper may pass this perimeter.

PART II: PARTICIPANT ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

To preserve safety when operating inside high-noise, natural marine environments, accountability frameworks must remain rigid and uniform across all camp divisions.

2.1 Swimmer Classification Protocols (PA.6)

- **In-Water Ocean Evaluation:** Every participant must undergo a practical skills assessment on day one of their session. This test must be conducted directly in the ocean environment to evaluate comfort levels against moving currents, chop, and shifting sand foundations.
- **Classification Standards:**
 - *Beginner / Non-Swimmer:* Demonstrate safe water entry, full head submersion, and wading control without signs of panic.
 - *Advanced Swimmer (Blue):* Continuously swim 100 yards utilizing a functional forward stroke, maintain a controlled water tread for 2 minutes, perform a stable back float for 1 minute, and maintain physical composure inside rolling chop.
- **Visual Tracking:** Campers are required to wear high-visibility, color-coded wristbands or heavy-duty swim caps matching their classification tier at all times within the waterfront zone.

2.2 The Buddy System & Auditory Checks (PA.5)

- **Pairing Mechanics:** Campers must be paired with an accountability partner within their exact same swimming tier. Buddies must remain within arm's reach of one another throughout the session.
- **Scheduled Auditory Checks:** The Waterfront Director or Lookout will command a structured buddy check every **10 to 15 minutes** using two sharp, high-decibel whistle blasts.
- **Mandatory Execution:** Upon hearing the signal, buddy pairs must instantly converge, interlock hands, raise their arms high above their heads, and remain silent. Lifeguards will execute a physical, manual headcount of pairs, validating the total water tally against the shore check-in gate logs.

PART III: COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (PA.3)

CRITICAL EMERGENCY TRIGGER

If a single scheduled buddy check fails to reconcile within 45 seconds, or if any staff member reports a suspected missing person scenario, the Lost Swimmer Plan (LSP) must be immediately initialized via **three sustained whistle blasts** or a continuous air-horn sequence.

3.1 Lost Swimmer Plan (LSP) Steps

STEP 1 Immediate Water Evacuation

All active lifeguards and shoreline staff must instantly clear all participants from the ocean. Counselors will gather campers by cabin or unit rows on the dry sand away from the water's edge to perform an immediate, face-to-name roster roll call.

STEP 2 Deployment of Lifeguard Subsurface Sweep Lines

The Waterfront Director organizes all rescue-certified staff into a tight, parallel human sweep chain. Lifeguards equipped with masks and snorkels will enter the water at the missing participant's last known location, executing coordinated surface dives and moving outward with the prevailing current and tidal drift.

STEP 3 Activation of Emergency Medical & Maritime Services

Concurrently with the sweep deployment, a designated shore administrator will dial 911. Dispatch operators must be informed that an open-water ocean missing person incident is underway. Staff will explicitly request immediate deployment from local marine patrol, regional dive rescue units, or the U.S. Coast Guard.

STEP 4 Securing Perimeters and Vehicle Access Routes

Counseling staff will escort all accounted-for campers completely away from the active beach area and back to secure inland camp structures. This keeps dry visual lines clear for search operations and guarantees unhindered access for incoming emergency vehicles.

PART IV: OFF-CAMPUS AQUATICS & TRIP SAFETY (PA.12)

Off-campus trips to public beaches, state parks, and commercial water parks introduce variables such as heavy public crowd interference and unfamiliar aquatic structures. The regulations below must govern all travel excursions.

4.1 Pre-Departure Site Clearance

- **Co-Guarded Facilities:** The Trip Leader must verify that the public destination is actively staffed by certified state, municipal, or private lifeguards. Camp staff supplement—never replace—local lifesavers.
- **Unguarded Venues:** If traveling to an un-lifeguarded natural site, the camp must transport its own certified waterfront lifeguards, rescue boards, and medical kits to establish an active, self-contained safety perimeter.

4.2 Supervision and Group Control Rules

RULE 1: The Shoreline "Spotter Ratio" Multiplier (PA.1)

Regardless of public lifeguard presence, campers are split into precise cohorts. For every 10 campers in the water, one camp counselor must stand on the dry shoreline as a dedicated, non-swimming "Spotter," maintaining exclusive visual scanning over their cohort.

RULE 2: Physical Base Establishment & Boundaries

Upon arrival, the Trip Leader must mark a clear "Base Camp" using camp flags or tents. Staff will walk the water line with campers to define hard lateral swim boundaries based on static public landmarks (e.g., public lifeguard piers or rock jetties).

RULE 3: Compressed Accountability Checks (PA.5)

To counter crowd distraction, off-campus buddy checks must occur every **10 minutes** using a high-decibel travel air horn. Face-to-name roster checks are mandatory during every physical transition: exiting transport vehicles, passing venue gates, entering the water, exiting the water, and re-boarding transportation.

4.3 Commercial Water Park Access Matrix

Park Feature	Shallow Zone Swimmers (Red)	Advanced Swimmers (Blue)
Wave Pools	Prohibited past the zero-depth entry line unless wearing a Type III USCG-approved PFD. Must remain in wading depths.	Permitted up to chest depth. Must remain clear of deep-water drop-offs near wave generators.
Lazy Rivers	Permitted only if utilizing an approved tube and accompanied by a counselor within arm's reach.	Permitted. Must maintain constant contact with their assigned buddy.
Body / Tube Slides	Permitted only if the slide terminates in a shallow run-out channel (< 2 feet) and satisfies manufacturer height criteria.	Fully permitted, subject to manufacturer height and safety regulations.

ACA Portfolio Integration & Field Audit Compliance

This consolidated manual serves as your formal operating blueprint for the Program Aquatics division. Keep a hard copy on file at your central administrative office and duplicates housed within field trip binders and waterfront stations. During your on-site accreditation evaluation, ACA visitors will cross-verify these written guidelines against live staff interviews, operational execution, and unannounced disaster drill timelines.