

OFF-CAMPUS AQUATICS SAFETY REGULATIONS

Standard Operating Procedures for Field Trips, Day Excursions & Public Waterfronts

Accreditation Target: American Camp Association (ACA)

Standard Classifications: PA.1 (Lookouts), PA.5 (Accountability), PA.12 (Off-Campus Aquatics)

Operational Scope: Off-Campus Activity Only

Document Code: SOP-AQ-02 (Off-Campus)

1. POLICY PURPOSE & SCOPE

Off-campus aquatic excursions—including day trips to public beaches, state parks, lakes, and commercial water parks—introduce unique risk factors. These include interaction with the general public, unfamiliar physical terrain, fluctuating environmental components, and variable third-party lifeguard coverage. This document establishes the mandatory regulations required to maintain an unbroken chain of custody, clear safety boundaries, and absolute camper accountability during any off-campus activity featuring water access.

2. PRE-DEPARTURE REQUIREMENTS & SITE CLEARANCE (PA.12)

2.1 Mandatory Facility Verification

Prior to scheduling, approving, or executing any trip involving swimming or water immersion, the Camp Director or Trip Coordinator must formally verify and document that the destination conforms to one of the two criteria below:

- **Co-Guarded Public Facilities:** A public aquatic venue continuously staffed by certified municipal, state, or private lifeguards. Camp personnel are legally required to supplement—never substitute—local lifeguard staff.
- **Unguarded Natural Sites:** If visiting an un-lifeguarded beach, spring, or natural waterway, the camp must transport its own fully certified open-water or waterfront lifeguards, designated rescue boards, and advanced first aid kits to establish an autonomous, secure swimming perimeter on-site.

2.2 Roster Integrity & Equipment Requirements

- **Trip Swimmer Metrics Binder:** The designated Trip Leader must carry a waterproof, self-contained binder containing the complete master trip roster, active camper emergency medical notes, and verified camp swim classifications (Red/Blue zone status) established during base-camp skills evaluations.
- **Participant Visual Signage:** Campers must remain outfitted in high-visibility camp-branded clothing, distinct matching swim caps, or color-coded wristbands that visually separate them from the general public at all times.

3. ON-SITE SUPERVISION & OPERATIONAL SAFETY BOUNDARIES

RULE 1: THE SHORELINE "SPOTTER RATIO" MULTIPLIER (PA.1)

Regardless of the presence of third-party public lifeguards, the camp must provide independent supervision. Campers are partitioned into static, small supervision cohorts. For every **10 campers** in or near the water, one camp counselor must be stationed on dry land as a dedicated, non-swimming "Spotter," maintaining uninterrupted scanning over their designated group.

RULE 2: PHYSICAL BASE ESTABLISHMENT & SAFETY PERIMETERS

Immediately upon arrival at any public site, the Trip Leader must set up a centralized "Base Camp" using high-visibility flags, tents, or camp markers. Staff must physically walk the shoreline with campers to establish hard lateral swim boundaries based on static public landmarks (e.g., "Do not swim past the concrete pier on the left or the red lifeguard tower on the right").

RULE 3: DIVING PROHIBITIONS & STRUCTURE RESTRICTIONS

Diving is universally prohibited in all natural off-campus settings. Campers are strictly barred from jumping off public piers, scaling coastal stone jetties, or diving into shallow tidal pools. Public floating platforms are restricted unless explicitly inspected and cleared by the Trip Leader.

4. PARTICIPANT ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSIT MECHANICS (PA.5)

4.1 Public Space Buddy System

The buddy system remains active and strictly enforced to mitigate crowd interference. Buddy pairs must be established within the exact same swimming classification level. Buddies are mandated to remain within arm's reach of one another at all times, including inside public changing facilities, restroom blocks, and concessions areas.

4.2 Compressed Off-Campus Buddy Check Schedule

Because public settings present high visual noise and large crowds, the timeline for accountability checks is accelerated:

- **Waterfront Buddy Checks:** Executed every **10 minutes** utilizing a high-decibel travel air horn or a distinct safety whistle sequence.
- **Transition Accounting Checks:** A strict face-to-name roster reconciliation must occur at every physical transition point: exiting the transport vehicle, entering the venue gate, entering the water zone, exiting the water zone, and re-boarding transportation.

5. COMMERCIAL WATER PARK OPERATIONAL MATRIX

When executing field trips to commercial water parks, camper access to specific rides and attractions is strictly regulated by their established base-camp swim classifications:

Water Park Feature	Shallow Zone Swimmers (Red Division)	Advanced Swimmers (Blue Division)
Wave Pools	Prohibited past the zero-depth entry line unless wearing a Type III USCG-approved PFD. Must remain exclusively in wading depths.	Permitted up to chest depth. Must remain completely clear of deep-water drop-offs located near wave generators.
Lazy Rivers	Permitted only if utilizing an approved floating tube and accompanied by a camp counselor within arm's reach.	Permitted. Must maintain constant visual 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 guidelines and posted safety regulations.

6. OFF-CAMPUS EMERGENCY ACTION INTERFACE (PA.3)

EMERGENCY COORDINATION PROTOCOL

If an off-campus buddy check fails to reconcile within 45 seconds, the Trip Leader must instantly trigger the emergency sequence.

1. Clear all camp participants from the water and consolidate them at the designated dry-land Base Camp for a face-to-name roster roll-call.
2. Immediately notify the on-site facility management and local public lifeguards to initialize their primary rescue and dive operations.
3. Simultaneously call 911 to alert local emergency services, notifying dispatch of an open-water missing person scenario.
4. Contact the main camp administration office to initialize the off-site crisis communication chain.

ACA Field Audit Portfolio Note (Standard PA.12)

This standalone document represents your camp's formal policy compliance folder for off-campus aquatic operations. Ensure that a printed copy is stored inside every field trip binder alongside vehicle logs and permission slips. During an accreditation field review, the ACA Visitor team will examine these explicit guidelines, verify trip log history, and check staff awareness of off-campus supervision multipliers.