

WATERFRONT SAFETY REGULATIONS

Ocean & Beach Operations Standard Operating Procedures

Target Accreditation: American Camp Association (ACA)

Environment Type: Natural Body of Water (Ocean/Beach)

Subject Framework: Program Aquatics (PA) Standards

Document Classification: Mandatory Operational Policy

Introduction & Purpose

Operating an ocean waterfront requires explicit risk management strategies that address the fluid dynamic nature of marine environments. This policy document establishes the mandatory safety frameworks, supervision protocols, boundary matrices, and accountability mechanics necessary to protect campers while maintaining strict compliance with the American Camp Association (ACA) Accreditation Standards.

1. Staffing, Supervision, & Certifications

This section addresses standards regarding aquatics leadership, specialized certifications, and active supervision patterns required for a natural body of water.

1.1 Waterfront Leadership Qualifications

- **Aquatics / Waterfront Director:** Must be at least 21 years of age, hold a current, nationally recognized Lifeguard Management or Waterfront Supervision credential, and have documented structural experience managing an open-water, surf, or tidal beachfront.
- **Ocean Lifeguard Requirements:** All aquatic personnel assigned to ocean or beach duties must possess a current lifeguarding credential that explicitly features open-water or waterfront operational modules (e.g., American Red Cross Waterfront Lifeguard or United States Lifesaving Association (USLA) Open Water Lifeguard). Pool-only or shallow-water credentials are strictly non-valid for ocean deployment.

1.2 Supervision Ratios & Dedicated Lookouts (PA.1)

- **Standard Aquatic Ratio:** A minimum strict baseline ratio of **1:10** (Lifeguard to Campers) must be actively maintained at the waterfront line during any swimming or wading operation.
- **Designated Lookout (PA.1):** For any swim group exceeding 10 total participants, at least one certified lifeguard must be explicitly designated as an elevated, dry-land "Lookout." This individual's sole structural duty is macro-scanning the entire aquatic zone. The Lookout is restricted from participating in direct skills

instruction, localized water play, or proximity-based guarding; they maintain a non-disrupted global view of the operational theater.

- **Administrative Supervision:** For sessions accommodating more than 50 total campers simultaneously, a minimum of two adult aquatic supervisors must remain stationed on deck to coordinate shoreline logs, interface with camp administration, and manage structural rotation schedules.

2. Site Safety & Ocean Environment Management

This section outlines the protocols required to evaluate physical sites and mitigate hazards dynamic to open ocean settings (PA.8, PA.9).

2.1 Daily Environmental Physical Assessment (PA.8)

Prior to any camper entry into the water, the Waterfront Director must perform a complete structural evaluation of local marine conditions and record the criteria in the Daily Waterfront Log:

- **Tidal Fluctuations & Currents:** Evaluate daily high/low tide timelines, track regional rip current risk assessments from the National Weather Service, and measure localized breaking surf height.
- **Physical Substrate Sweep:** Conduct a walking sweep of the shoreline and shallow wade-line to evaluate sharp shell build-ups, dynamic drop-offs, hazardous marine debris, or localized biological hazards (e.g., Portuguese man-of-war, jellyfish blooms, stingrays).
- **Water Quality Verification:** Cross-reference local public health or environmental protection agency indices daily. Swimming operations are immediately suspended if active bacterial advisories or harmful algal blooms (HABs) are reported.

2.2 Boundary Matrix & Visual Safety Perimeter (PA.9)

Ocean swim perimeters must adjust dynamically based on tidal movement and surf structures. Boundaries are demarcated using highly visible systems as outlined below:

Zone Designator	Skill Classification	Maximum Depth	Physical Markers
Shallow Zone (Red Division)	Non-Swimmers & Beginners	Non-Swimmers: Knee-to-waist deep maximum. Beginners: Chest deep maximum.	High-visibility shore flags on the dry sand denoting lateral boundaries; heavily anchored, colored perimeter buoys.
Deep Zone (Blue Division)	Advanced Swimmers	Overhead depth up to the designated outer safety perimeter.	Distinctly colored outer buoy line. No camper may pass the outer boundary under any circumstance.

3. Safety Systems & Participant Accountability

Systems of accountability must remain rigid to offset the variable visibility common to natural ocean systems (PA.5, PA.6).

3.1 Participant Swimmer Classification Protocols (PA.6)

- **Ocean Environment Evaluation:** Every participant must undergo a practical in-water skills assessment on day one of their camp session. To satisfy safety metrics, this evaluation must occur directly within the ocean environment to judge comfort levels against waves, moving tides, and uneven ocean floor terrain.
- **Evaluation Metrics:**
 - *Beginner / Non-Swimmer:* Demonstrate controlled entry, submerge head fully, and wade without signs of panic or balance loss.
 - *Advanced Swimmer (Blue):* Continuously swim 100 yards utilizing an efficient forward stroke (freestyle or breaststroke), maintain a static water tread for 2 minutes, perform a back float for 1 minute, and demonstrate uncompromised physical control within shifting chop.
- **Visual Identification:** Campers must wear high-visibility, color-coded wristbands or heavy-duty swim caps corresponding directly to their classified zone designation at all times within the waterfront area.

3.2 The Buddy System & Accountability Mechanics (PA.5)

- **Buddy Pairing:** Campers are strictly paired with a partner belonging to the same swim classification level. Buddies are mandated to remain within arm's length of each other during all open-water activities.
- **Systemic Buddy Checks:** The Waterfront Director or active Lookout will command a structured "Buddy Check" every **10 to 15 minutes** utilizing an explicit auditory signal (e.g., two high-decibel whistle blasts).
- **Mandatory Execution:** Upon the whistle signal, camper pairs must instantly converge, interlock hands, raise their arms high above their heads, and cease all talking. Water guards will execute an exact physical and manual count of the pairs, reconciling the water tally with the shore gate-log before clearing the zone to resume swimming.

4. Emergency Management & Missing Swimmer Protocol

This section sets forth the emergency response parameters in the event of an un-reconciled buddy count or a suspected submerged camper (PA.3).

CRITICAL EMERGENCY TRIGGER

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

4.1 Lost Swimmer Plan (LSP) – Ocean Operational Variant

STEP 1 Immediate Water Evacuation

All active water and land staff must instantly clear all participants from the ocean. Counselors and shore team members must gather campers by cabin or unit lines on the dry sand area to perform immediate, documented roll-call procedures.

STEP 2 Deployment of Lifeguard Sweep Lines

The Waterfront Director or Incident Commander organizes the rescue-certified staff into a tight, parallel human sweep chain. Staff equipped with masks and snorkels will enter the water at the missing camper's last known point of location, sweeping with the prevailing ocean drift and current outwards.

STEP 3 Activation of Emergency Medical & Maritime Services

Concurrently with Step 2, a designated shore administrator will contact 911 emergency dispatch services. Staff must explicitly request local marine patrol, Coast Guard, or regional fire-rescue water rescue assets, providing exact coordinates and current drift directions.

STEP 4 Securing Perimeter and Access Routes

Counseling staff must escort all cleared, accounted-for campers entirely away from the active shoreline to a secure inland camp structure. This keeps visual fields clear for search operators and ensures absolute, unobstructed access for emergency response vehicles.

ACA Compliance & On-Site Evaluation Note

A hard copy of these regulations must remain accessible within the primary waterfront station house alongside historical daily water logs, staff certification files, and local agency water safety clearances. During an accreditation visit, the ACA Visitor team will cross-reference these written directives against the live execution of standard operations and emergency drill performance.