

Risk Management Considerations – General Water Activities

When reviewing Water Activities the following is a guide only of areas to consider – Please note this is not a complete list as the exposures will differ depending on the defined event or activity as there are many variables that must be taken into consideration. You should complete a specific risk assessment to highlight, assess, control and monitor hazards associated with each water activity at each location.

Areas for consideration in your Risk Assessment

- Where are the activities to be conducted?
- Will the activity be conducted at the same location? Or will it change?
- How will a location for the water activity be sourced? Do you have selection criteria for choosing the location for your water activity? Are guidelines in place to consider all types of hazards
- What are the waterways like? Depth, waves, ocean floor, river floor
- Surf conditions – swell, tides, depth, tide, rip, current, beach structure, rocks, sand bars, wave height
- Check the water depth – it must be appropriate for the activity and check for debris in the water.
- Weather conditions – wind/storm/temperature heat and cold/light/is the area prone to poor visibility due to fog
- Bush fire risk to participants – what to do in the event of an emergency – What is the evacuation plan?
- Consider water visibility – can participants see the ocean floor or is the water dark/black consider the hazards
- Does the location have depth indicators?
- Are the locations suitable for the activity? Obtain local knowledge of the beach/river/lake and the area to be used
- Consider other location specific hazards this may include: collision with water craft in the area, collision with other activities or groups, debris in the water, submerged material.
- Is the location cleaned regularly does it contain litter such as broken glass, hypodermic needles, medical waste, fish netting, rusted material etc.
- Consider a checklist for use on location to be documented prior to and assessed during an activity in addition to the risk assessment and other control mechanisms.
- Skill and competency level of participants – how will this be determined, how will groups be divided and less experienced swimmers and experienced swimmers supported
- Number of participants
- Number of supervisors – the ratio – is it adequate?
- What is the age of participants? Are the water activities suitable for the age group – consider age restriction or limitation and skills and competency limitations/restrictions

- Adequate number of persons suitably qualified and current in First Aid– resuscitation protocols
- Training protocols for First Aid Staff
- Is a patrol on duty? Can the activity be run at a time/location where beaches are patrolled? Consider the requirements and safety of the water activities.
- Are rescue, first aid and revival equipment available and well maintained? Is maintenance documented?
- Are there an adequate number of persons suitably qualified in First Aid?
- Current training and qualifications of staff in First Aid
- Competency and training of staff conducting water activities – including swimming capabilities – bronze medal etc., general ability and health status at the time of the activity. Minimum qualifications for persons conducting the activity.
- Infectious Disease Control – waterborne viruses, bacteria, fresh and marine algae, sewage discharge indicators such as E.coli etc. refer to local government websites and Environmental Authorities/Departments prior to the activity – ensure any area signs are read and actioned.
- Physical exertion – consider warm up and cool down activities/fatigue indicators, flotation devices and other means for assisting swimmers
- Supervision and Instruction – Clear instruction in relation to no diving/jumping, ensure students are made aware of the local area risks and to consider water conditions when entering the water including what is under the water and can not be seen. Clearly articulate boundaries for swimming areas, considering distances from shore in the event rescue and first aid is required, ensure the environment is checked and conditions reviewed regularly. Clear Instructions with regard to Health, Safety & the Environmental conditions. Beware of specific hazards/what to do in an emergency/fatigue. Strict consequences if instructions are not followed such as being removed from the water.
- How will constant supervision of students be maintained in the water? For example a buddy system in the water and surveillance ratios of people on shore to swimmers.
- Provision of personal protective clothing such as soft helmets, life jackets, goggles – are they to Australian Standards, are they adequately maintained, no signs of fraying on straps, consider wear and tear.
- Water activities such as kayaking – condition of kayak, maintenance of kayak, documented maintenance program for each kayak, each kayak checked prior to use by a suitably qualified person, water equipment such as inflatables used only as per manufacturer’s instructions.
- Suitability, adequacy and maintenance of diving platforms in public areas – it is prudent to restrict jumping or diving activities especially in waterways.
- Maintenance of all equipment involved in the activity including first aid equipment and rescue vehicles.
- Consider the hazards posed by water equipment be it slides, flotation devices, inflatables, dive towers are they appropriate for the age group, well maintained and suitable for the task, used as per manufacturer’s instructions.
- Provision of Personal Protective Equipment – life jackets, soft head protection, goggles etc.

- Guidelines on the removal of jewellery as it can cause injury if it becomes externally attached.
- Guidelines on appropriate footwear with sturdy soles in and out of the water to minimise injury.
- Consider fauna and flora and allergies ensure items such as ventolin and epipens are available refer to medical conditions of students prior to the activity to ensure all needs are accounted for.
- Medical conditions, special needs, high risk behaviour – consider how these students will be supported during the event and any specific hazards that may arise.
- Consider flying objects from the environment, water vehicles, safety apparatus, water activity equipment, other swimmers
- Dangerous animals – blue ringed octopus, box jelly fish, stingrays, cone shell, cat fish, sea wasp, bullrout, snakes – consider high risk areas/locations, seasonality of the activity and dangerous animals, ask locals, review local government warnings and websites, first aid requirements, distance to emergency services. Consider animals of local and regional importance.
- Communication – how will the people in the group communicate to ensure everyone is safe? (Walkie talkies front and back of group) How will they communicate where they are going? Is the course mapped (for example for kayaks) and have weather conditions been referred to prior to and during the activity – over several days for kayaking camps etc. How will they communicate to emergency services – mobile phone reception in the area?
- Sun safety – hats, sunscreen, rash vests, provision of drinking water, snacks, check the UV index, cold weather – wind chill, wetsuits
- Industrial chemicals, oil, detergents, agricultural chemicals present in the water and that could be contaminated by the water activities.
- View and follow all warning signage and notices
- Cover all pre-existing injuries with water-proof dressings
- Bites from Mosquitos
- Consider and review beach ratings
- Be clear under what conditions the activity will be cancelled.
- Ensure no drugs, alcohol or medication is consumed – this may impair reaction times, drowsiness, vision, balance, judgement etc.
- Collision Risk – with vessels/structures/river bank/people/floating objects/submerged objects
- Capsizing of vessel – potential injury, supervision in the event of, staying in a group, visibility between each vessel, person overboard, swimmer in trouble – how will this be actioned if in a kayak – is there a motorised boat running beside the activity, road vehicles following the activity, life jackets, rescue flotation devices, access to first aid in kayaks etc.
- Other location specific hazards
- Is a contractor conducting the water activity? What is your contractor selection process? Do you have a preferred Supplier List? Is this contractor a preferred supplier? Ensure you have a contract in place with your contractor. Ensure your contractor has Health, Safety and Environment Guidelines. Ask your contractor how they will ensure the safety of participants? What are their requirements in relation to supervisor/student ratios in the water?

Assess your contractors competency this may include - What competencies do they have to complete the task – qualifications/training. How often do they conduct this activity? Do they have any references you can contact? How does the contractor select the location for the water activity? Obtain a copy of the contractors risk assessment in relation to the water activity including the specific location the activities are to be conducted. Does the contractor have insurance ask them to provide a certificate of currency – Public Liability Insurance, Professional Indemnity and Workers Compensation Insurance should be considered. Induction, Training, instruction and supervision information that will be provided during the activity. Details on First Aid and equipment maintenance on equipment that will be provided. Ask for copies of documents to place on the contractors file and to support your Contractor Selection Process.

- Please refer to the following resources

Resources and reference documents:

Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water

www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/eh38

<http://www.lifesaving.com.au/downloads/Surf%20Sports/2012/IRB/Aquatic%20Activity%20Risk%20Assessment%20Management%20Form.pdf>

<http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/eppr/health/hlspr012/assess.pdf>

<http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/eppr/health/hlspr012/resources/swimmingrec.pdf>

http://www.rowingvictoria.asn.au/documents/rulesandpolicies/Risk_Assessment_NW_SC_Carrum_Dec08.pdf

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