



# SAFE SWIM DEFENSE

BOY SCOUTS  OF AMERICA®

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**BSA groups shall use *Safe Swim Defense* for all swimming activities. Adult leaders supervising a swimming activity must have completed *Safe Swim Defense* training within the previous two years.**

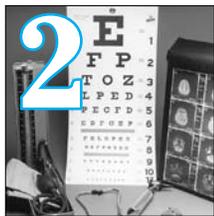
*Safe Swim Defense* standards apply at backyard, hotel, apartment, and public pools; at established waterfront swim areas such as state park beaches and Army Corps of Engineer lakes; and at all temporary swimming areas such as lakes, rivers, or oceans. *Safe Swim Defense* does not apply to boating or water activities such as waterskiing or swamped boat drills that are covered by *Safety Afloat* guidelines. *Safe Swim Defense* applies to other non-swimming activities whenever participants enter water over knee deep, or when submersion is likely, for example, when fording a stream, seining for bait, or constructing a bridge as a pioneering project. Snorkeling in open water requires demonstrated knowledge and skills equivalent to those for Snorkeling, BSA in addition to following *Safe Swim Defense*. Scuba activities must be conducted in accordance with the BSA scuba policy found in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*.

*Safe Swim Defense* training may be obtained from the BSA online learning center at [www.olc.scouting.org](http://www.olc.scouting.org), at council summer camps, and at other council and district training events. Confirmation of training is required on local and national tour permits for trips that involve swimming. Additional information on various swimming venues is provided in *Aquatics Supervision*, which will soon be available from council service centers.

## QUALIFIED SUPERVISION

**All swimming activity must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult age 21 or older who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of those in his or her care, and who is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of *Safe Swim Defense*.**

It is strongly recommended that all units have at least one adult or older youth member currently trained in BSA Swimming & Water Rescue or BSA Lifeguard to assist in the planning and conduct of all swimming activities.



## PERSONAL HEALTH REVIEW

**A complete health history is required of all participants as evidence of fitness for swimming activities. Forms for minors must be signed by a parent or legal guardian.**

Participants should be asked to relate any recent incidents of illness or injury just prior to the activity. Supervision and protection should be adjusted to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. For significant health conditions, the adult supervisor should require an examination by a physician and consult with the parent, guardian, or caregiver for appropriate precautions.

## SAFE AREA

**All swimming areas must be carefully inspected and prepared for safety prior to each activity. Water depth, quality, temperature, movement, and clarity are important considerations. Hazards must be eliminated or isolated by conspicuous markings and discussed with participants.**

**Controlled Access:** There must be safe areas for all participating ability groups to enter and exit the water. Swimming areas of appropriate depth must be defined for each ability group. The entire area must be within easy reach of designated rescue personnel. The area must be clear of boat traffic, surfing, or other nonswimming activities.

**Bottom Conditions and Depth:** The bottom must be clear of trees and debris. Abrupt changes in depth are not allowed in the nonswimmer area. Isolated underwater hazards should be marked with floats. Rescue personnel must be able to easily reach the bottom. Maximum recommended depth in clear water is 12 feet. Maximum depth in turbid water is 8 feet.

**Visibility:** Underwater swimming and diving are prohibited in turbid water. Turbid water exists when a swimmer treading water cannot see his feet. Swimming at night is only allowed in areas with water clarity and lighting sufficient for good visibility both above and below the surface.

**Diving and elevated entry:** Diving is permitted only into clear, unobstructed water from heights no greater than 40 inches. Water depth must be at least 7 feet. Bottom depth contours below diving boards and elevated surfaces require greater water depths and must conform to state regulations. Participants should not jump into water from heights greater than they are tall, and should only jump into water chest-deep or deeper with minimal risk from contact with the bottom. No elevated entry is permitted where the person must clear any obstacle, including land.

**Water temperature:** Comfortable water temperature for swimming is near 80°F. Activity in water at 70°F or below should be of limited duration and closely monitored for negative effects of chilling.

**Water quality:** Bodies of stagnant, foul water; areas with significant algae or foam; or areas polluted by livestock or waterfowl should be avoided. Comply with any signs posted by local health authorities. Swimming is not allowed in swimming pools with green, murky, or cloudy water.

**Moving water:** Participants should be able to easily regain and maintain their footing in currents or waves. Areas with large waves, swiftly flowing currents, or moderate currents that flow toward the open sea or into areas of danger should be avoided.

**Weather:** Participants should be moved from the water to a position of safety whenever lightning or thunder threatens. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning flash or thunder before leaving shelter. Take precautions to prevent sunburn, dehydration, and hypothermia.

**PFD use:** Swimming in clear water over 12 feet deep, in turbid water over 8 feet deep, or in flowing water may be allowed if all participants wear properly fitted personal flotation devices (PFDs) and the supervisor determines that swimming with PFDs is safe under the circumstances.

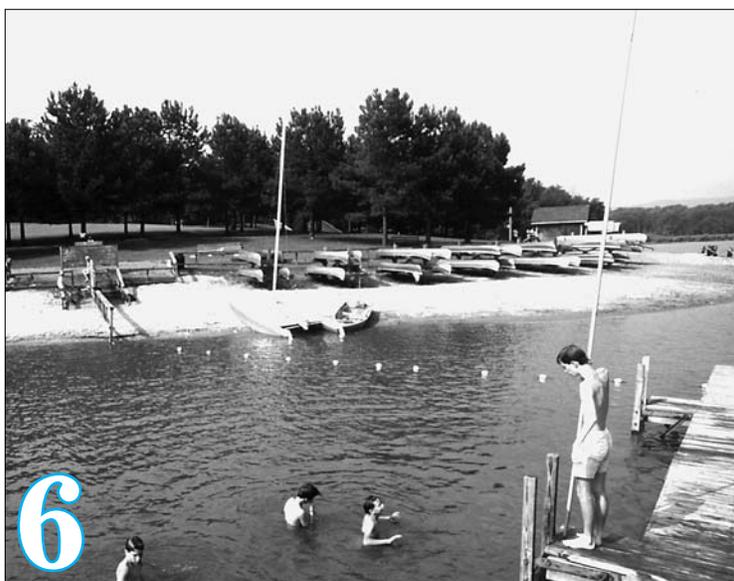




## RESPONSE PERSONNEL (LIFEGUARDS)

Every swimming activity must be closely and continuously monitored by a trained rescue team on the alert for and ready to respond during emergencies.

Professionally trained lifeguards satisfy this need when provided by a regulated facility or tour operator. When lifeguards are not provided, the adult supervisor must assign at least two rescue personnel, with additional numbers to maintain a ratio to participants of 1:10. The supervisor must provide instruction and rescue equipment and assign areas of responsibility as outlined in Aquatics Supervision. The qualified supervisor, the designated response personnel, and the lookout work together as a safety team. An emergency action plan should be formulated and shared with participants as appropriate.



## ABILITY GROUPS

All youth and adult participants are designated as *swimmers*, *beginners*, or *nonswimmers* based on swimming ability confirmed by standardized BSA swim classification tests. Each group is assigned a specific swimming area with depths consistent with those abilities.

The classification tests should be renewed annually, preferably at the beginning of the season.

Swimmers must pass this test: Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, and swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating.

Beginners must pass this test: Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, and swim 25 feet on the surface; then stop, turn sharply, and resume swimming, returning to the starting place.

Anyone who has not completed either the beginner or swimmer test is classified as a nonswimmer.

The nonswimmer area should be no more than waist- to chest-deep and should be enclosed by physical boundaries such as the shore, a pier, or lines. The enclosed beginner area should contain water of standing depth and may extend to depths just over the head. The swimmer area may be up to 12 feet in depth in clear water and should be defined by floats or other markers.

## LOOKOUT

The lookout continuously monitors the conduct of the swimmers, identifies any departures from *Safe Swim Defense* guidelines, alerts rescue personnel as needed, and monitors the weather and environment.

The lookout should have a clear view of the entire area but be close enough for easy verbal communication. The lookout must have a sound understanding of *Safe Swim Defense* but is not required to perform rescues. The adult supervisor may serve simultaneously as the lookout, but must assign the task to someone else if engaged in activities that preclude focused observation.



## BUDDY SYSTEM

Every participant is paired with another. Buddies stay together, monitor each other, and alert the safety team if either needs assistance or is missing.

Buddies check into and out of the area together. Buddies

are normally in the same ability group and remain in their assigned area. If they are not of the same ability group, then they swim in the area assigned to the buddy with the lesser ability.

A buddy check reminds participants of their obligation to monitor their buddies and indicates how closely the buddies are keeping track of one another. Roughly every 10 minutes, or as needed to keep the buddies together, the lookout, or other person designated by the supervisor, gives an audible signal, such as a single whistle blast, and a call for buddies. Buddies are expected to raise each other's hand before completion of a slow, audible count to 10. Buddies who take longer to find one another should be reminded of their responsibility for the other's safety.

Once everyone has a buddy, a count is made by area and compared with the total number known to be in the water. After the count is confirmed, a signal is given to resume swimming.



## DISCIPLINE

Rules are effective only when followed. All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe swimming provided by

*Safe Swim Defense* guidelines. Applicable rules should be discussed prior to the outing and reviewed for all participants at the water's edge just before the swimming activity begins.

People are more likely to follow directions when they know the reasons for rules and procedures. Consistent, impartially applied rules supported by skill and good judgment provide stepping-stones to a safe, enjoyable outing.





Coaching and commitment card, No. 34243

## YOU CAN SET UP A SAFE SWIM AREA

Here is an easy, quick way to make a swimming area safe. Take with you most of the equipment and material needed to conduct a swim during a day hike or overnight or short-term camp. The rest of you can pick up at the campsite. Minimum equipment includes: 100 feet of  $\frac{3}{8}$ " nylon line, two dozen balloons, 200 feet of binder twine, a hand ax, a pocketknife, and a pencil.

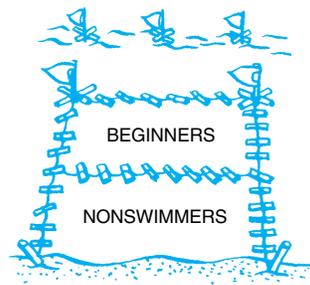
Organize the swimmers in the line holding hands to check the bottom of the area—less than 6 feet in depth—to be used. Use a strong swimmer to scout the area, up to 12 feet, by looking for deep holes, rocks, stumps, or dangerous debris. He should work at the end of a lifeline-bowline around shoulder, with a buddy tending line at shoreline.

Use binder twine to mark off and enclose the areas for nonswimmers, maximum depth  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet, and for beginners, maximum depth 6 feet. Support the line with deadwood floats cut by hand ax. Large rocks tied with twine make good anchors at the outside corners where buoys (plastic jugs or balloons) should be placed. Do not use glass bottles because of possible breakage.

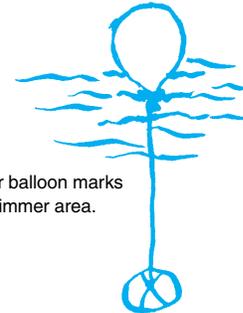
Swimmers use deep water beyond these areas, maximum depth 12 feet. Mark other outside limits with buoys only. To improvise these buoys, use yellow, orange, or white balloons tied to a rock anchor on the bottom.

Many units that swim regularly carry some type of portable checkboard and use official BSA buddy tags, No. 01595. This is a great idea, but protection is equally effective with an improvised buddy check system: For each participant, whittle a short, pointed peg, flat on one side. Write the person's name with a pencil on the flat part. Buddies stick their pegs into the ground at a marked place as they check in by buddy pairs. When a buddy pair checks out of swimming, they remove their pegs.

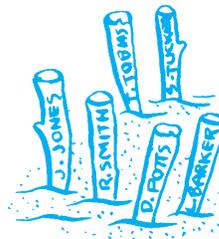
Customarily, a qualified adult supervises swimming, also serves as lookout, and gives buddy calls. This person should be located at a vantage point where everything in all areas can be seen and heard. At water's edge a two-person lifeguard team keeps close watch on all swimmers and stands ready with 100 feet of rescue line to help anyone in trouble. The rescuer ties a bowline on his end of the line and places it over his shoulder and around his chest. As he swims to a rescue, his buddy pays out the line from a hand-held coil, a chain-knotted line, or a "pineapple ball." Either the victim grasps the line, or the rescuer grasps the victim, and both victim and rescuer are pulled back to shore by the line-tender.



Swim areas using binder twine, sticks, jugs, or balloons.



Plastic jug or balloon marks corner of swimmer area.



Whittled pegs are used for buddy "tags."



Lifeguards stand by with a "ready line."



## LOOKOUTS AND LIFEGUARDS

Lifeguards and lookouts must not take their eyes off the water and the swimmers. Keep all swimmers clearly in view and avoid talking to others when on duty. The time may come when your attention and alertness will save a life. Be alert. Be serious about your responsibility.

## WHO CAN INSTRUCT THIS TRAINING?

This training can be taught by individuals who have been authorized by the council. The council will identify aquatics resource individuals as Safe Swim Defense instructors. For example, the council may select those with aquatics experience such as aquatics instructors, district/council training staff, and unit leaders.

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