Developing a Creative & Comprehensive Life-Guard In-Service Program

Connie Harvey

Connie Harvey is the manager of aquatics programs at the American Red Cross Preparedness and Health and Safety department at national headquarters. She started with the Red Cross in 1996 as an associate for new products and services development.

Connie’s recent projects included leading the development and implementation of the CPR/AED for Professional Rescuers and Healthcare Providers, Swimming and Water Safety, Home Pool Essentials: Maintenance and Safety and the Wilderness and Remote First Aid programs. Connie is currently responsible for the development of the 2011 revisions of the Red Cross Lifeguarding program. She is a member of the Drowning Prevention Commission of the International Life Saving Federation. In February 2010, she was named as one of the Power 25 in aquatics by Aquatics International magazine.

Connie is a national spokesperson for the organization regarding first aid, CPR, water safety and other health and safety issues. She is a regular speaker at national conferences and for Health and Safety department initiatives, such as program rollouts and national trainings. Her numerous television interviews on topics related to health and safety include repeated appearances on Today on NBC. She has also appeared on CNN Headline News, Live With Regis and Kelly and The Early Show (CBS This Morning).

Abstract

It is widely understood in the aquatics industry that training cannot stop at the initial training that lifeguards receive. A robust in-service training program is essential for building an effective lifeguard and aquatic safety team. The challenge for many aquatic facility managers, however, is developing a comprehensive in-service training program that is effective, yet creative and challenging. This session will highlight essential topics of an in-service training program that builds skills, creates confidence, strengthens teams and, most importantly, saves lives. It will also provide resources and suggestions for activities that managers can take back to their own programs.
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Session Agenda

- The need
- Objectives of an in-service training program
- Essential topics
- Resources for developing your program
- Making your plan

The Need

- CPR skills decline quickly among lay and professional responders
  - Without retraining, CPR skills are likely to decay significantly within 6 months of initial training if not sooner
  - After retraining, CPR skills are likely to decay significantly within 7 months
- AED skills deteriorate at a slower rate than CPR skills, but do deteriorate
- Anecdotal reports suggest that aquatic-specific skills decline quickly
- Research from multiple fields shows that initial measures of program learning do not necessarily correlate with long-term knowledge or ability

*Source: Presentation by K. Fotian and M. Espino, WAHC, Oct 2010*
The Need

- Standards
  - U.S. Lifeguard Standards Coalition Report
    - Physical Competency, Standard: All employed lifeguards need to meet the minimum level of fitness required for the lifeguard physical skill set.
    - Physical Competency, Guidelines:
      - Test all lifeguards at least every 10 to 12 weeks to ensure maintenance of PSS and fitness.
      - Provide for, or require, specific exercise by employed lifeguards to ensure the maintenance of the minimum level of fitness required by the PSS.
    - Vigilance, Standard: Because sleep deprivation decreases vigilance even after a “recovery” night of sleep, training and inservice protocols should emphasize the need for lifeguards to obtain a full night’s sleep before assuming lifeguard duties.
    - Vigilance, Guideline: Training relating to the use of different intervention options should be incorporated.
    - Vigilance, Option: Aerobic exercise can positively impact a subsequent vigilance task. Lifeguards should consider including exercise periods during their breaks as a way to subsequently improve vigilance.
  - Model Aquatic Health Code
- Legislation

Objectives

- Provide facility-specific training
- Ensure teamwork (facility staff and beyond)
- Maintain sharp knowledge and skills
- Ensure physical competency
- Ensure readiness to respond at all times
- Keep up with changing standards

Essential Topics

- Review of skills
  - CPR, AED, first aid and lifeguarding rescue skills
- Scenarios
  - Requiring decision making skills
  - Including taking them “outside the zone”
- Emergency action plans
  - Reinforcing elements of plans
  - Different scenarios and elements of surprise
  - Engaging other facility staff and local rescue personnel
- Physical training, including:
  - Facility specific “challenges”
  - Ability for sustained performance of specific rescue skills
- Information and training on new regulations or “topics of the day”
Outstanding Resources

For in-service training ideas:
• National training organizations
  – American Red Cross Lifeguard Management CD-ROM – about 100 in-service training outlines
• The Internet
  – Google searches
• Industry publications and sites
  – Aquatics International and AI Connect
  – Parks and Recreation magazine
• Your colleagues
  – State recreation and park association resources
• Books

Making Your Plan

• Make an effort
  – In long-term planning
  – Individual sessions
• Keep it varied, challenging and fun
• Include goals, both personal and team
• Provide incentives and rewards
• Make it important
• Document the training

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