

Pool assessments continue

The ISRM Pool Safety Award continues to thrive, with more and more pools benefiting from assessment and subsequent advice

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Applications for certification under the ISRM Pool Safety Award continue to be received. The autumn of 2003 saw a busy programme of assessments. Among the pools that have been through the assessment process and taken the necessary actions to achieve certification are: Tynemouth Swimming Pool; Whitley Bay Swimming Pool; Dolphin Leisure Centre, Haywards Heath; Kings Leisure Centre, East Grinstead; Triangle Leisure Centre, Burgess Hill; Cascades Leisure Centre, Craigavon; Quarry Swimming and Fitness Centre, Shrewsbury; Hetton Pool; Crowtree Leisure Centre, Sunderland; Washington Leisure Centre; and Newcastle Road Baths, Sunderland.

A number of other pools are producing their action plan for risk reduction in order to gain certification and a few pools have been refused certification at this stage, subject to a re-assessment.

Strengths

All pools are benefiting from identifying significant areas for improvement, but there are also common strengths, such as:

- Lifeguard training programmes are generally comprehensive. The IQL Approved Training Centre Scheme appears to be contributing very positively to the continual improvement of standards of delivery;
- Water clarity standards have been excellent;
- Pool Safety operating procedures have always been in place, but the quality and completeness of the documentation varies considerably;
- Hygiene levels are generally good, but the documented planning of cleaning programmes varies in their detailed requirements;
- Customer safety information signs are generally clear and sufficient;
- First aid facilities and adequate provision of rescue equipment;
- Inspection regimes are good, including pool water testing and checking of alarms;
- Lifeguards are normally wearing distinctive uniforms; and
- The overall presentation of the pool and changing areas is generally good, despite some ageing facilities. There is evidence of considerable care and attention by staff at some pools, despite limited budgets.

Areas for improvement

There are a number of areas for improvement, which have cropped up on more than one occasion in the past year.

Lifeguard vigilance – One disturbing trend from some of the pools participating in the Pool Safety Award, and other mystery visitor programmes, is the incidence of increasing examples of an apparent lack of lifeguard vigilance. While many pools demonstrate, on the whole, a vigilant approach by lifeguards, the perception with some pools is that some lifeguards do not appreciate the importance of the role. On a number of occasions lifeguards have been observed standing together for up to an hour chatting poolside. We have also seen one incident of a lifeguard asleep in the high chair and horseplay by lifeguards, including the apparent re-enactment of the previous Saturday's *Match of the Day* without

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a ball! There appears to be an issue with behaviour of some lifeguards when managers are not on site.

Child Admission Policy – Another trend is the active implementation of the ISRM Child Admission Policy. Generally, pools are addressing the guidance from ISRM issued in September 2002. This is pleasing to see, although quite a few have not taken the opportunity to build in flexibility, which is offered under the ISRM guidance. In certain circumstances opportunities exist for increasing the ratio of under-eights accompanying a responsible person over the age of 16, e.g. through the use of floatation devices or a swimming competency test. It is only in a small number of cases where this opportunity has been taken. However, it is pleasing to see most pools reviewing their policy based on this major publication from ISRM. Some pools however have still not adequately considered the guidance.

Pool security – Ensuring that the pool is secure from unauthorised access when it is closed to bathers, but members of the public are in the building, is a key safety requirement. The control measures must also consider preventing unauthorised access shortly after the pool has been cleared when bathers are in the changing rooms.

Swimming teachers and rescue qualifications – The requirement for suitably-qualified rescue cover on swimming lessons is established. However, in accordance with best practice, consideration should be given to some refresher training for those teachers who have the 'Rescue

Test for Teachers of Swimming' qualification. Given that this qualification lasts for two years, it is not unreasonable to provide some refresher training at no more than six-month intervals.

Club lifeguarding – Clubs that provide their own rescue-qualified staff to guard club sessions should be proactively monitored by duty staff to ensure that the competent cover is actually poolside. The pool management should also monitor that those persons on pool actually have a current and appropriate qualification.

Risk assessment – These are normally in place, but the many of those reviewed do not adequately assess all significant hazards. This can be a major problem for the pool operator, should a serious accident occur, when relevant hazards and control measures have not been fully assessed. Examples include the adequacy of lifeguard supervision zones, all user groups and activities and the safety of the lifeguards themselves.

Normal operating procedures – These are generally well prepared, but omissions include zones of supervision and patrolling policies. It is also important to ensure that lifeguard numbers and positions for all sessions are clearly defined and documented.

Pool roof and structural checks – Few pools have evidence to hand that the pool roof is periodically checked by structural engineers for structural adequacy. This is particularly important where there is a suspended ceiling above the pool hall, where the roof supports can be weakened by the chlorinous atmosphere. This control should also extend to ventilation ducts and waterslide supports.

Water quality tests – While routine tests for disinfection and pH are strong, weekly and periodic tests, such as balanced water and TDS, vary from pool to pool.

COSHH and chemical lines – Good practice now requires that the chemical feed lines in the plant room, e.g. disinfection and pH, are marked so as to be easily identified for the benefit of persons working in the plant room, or in the event of a leak.

After a first full year of operation of the award, we are extremely pleased with the impact on pool safety, and with the enthusiastic response of organisations to test their pool safety standards against best practice.

Work is currently being undertaken to develop the award further through the introduction of a National Standard, under the auspices of British standards. This standard, effectively a Code of Practice, is termed PAS (Publicly Available Standard) and will then give national recognition and significance to the scheme. ●