USMS Open Water Safety Webinar Series
Swimmer Safety
Risk Management 101

• Swimming is a high risk activity

• 1 in every 140,000 that go in the water drown

• Because there is risk there is duty to protect

6/22/2014
Risk in Open Water

• Article Trouble Beneath the Surface by Bonnie Ford 10/13
• In a seven year span 44 people died during or immediately upon exiting the swim leg.
• Over 50% of these deaths were men in the 40’s and 50’s
• 4,300 USTA sanctioned events annually versus approximately 50 USMS Sanctions in 2014
Safety and Education Initiatives

- These are becoming the most common mitigation strategy and race directors are increasingly abandoning traditional mass starts
Training and Readiness

• Gerry Rodrigues excellent blog was picked up by ESPN as he responded to the Trouble Beneath the Surface article.
• “No replacement for proper training and readiness”
• Gerry compiled an excellent swimmer preparation list:
  http://swimswam.com/open-water-swimming-safety-powerfulmessage/
Gerry Rodrigues List

• Receive medical clearance for training and racing.
• Hire a coach or get on a reputable and proven training plan.
• Spend ample time preparing for the distance.
• Spend ample time preparing for all types of racing conditions: cold water, warm water, currents, winds, low visibility, blinding reflection and sun, choppy waters, big surf conditions, rip tides.
• Acquire the skills of proper and frequent navigation.
• Become very familiar with swimming in very close quarters to others.
• Familiarize and prepare yourself for the discomfort from contact at race starts, buoy turns and swim “claustrophobia”.
• Practice in open water with a group, simulating race-like conditions.
• Have a proper-fitting wetsuit that is tested and familiar prior to racing (where applicable).
• Have a real swim race plan, not simply “I just want to get to my bike” (where applicable).
• Warm up properly.
• Start to the side of your group.
• Only swim fast at the beginning if it was part of your training preparation.
• Use rhythmic breathing with a 2nd-stroke frequency; no 3rd-stroke or higher breathing.
• The moment you have difficulty, roll over on to your back and wave your arms for assistance.
• Establish personal temperature collars, and adhere to them.
Other Safety Considerations

• “Open water swims have obstacles to identifying distressed athletes and initiating timely resuscitation on open water” Dr. Kevin Harris, Minneapolis Heart Institute

• Some Swimmers should seek medical clearance before attempting to participate in stressful events.

• Water Conditions (temperature, sea state)
Waiver, Disclaimer, Warning

- Make sure swimmers know of any inherent risks for the event.
- Have everyone read and sign a waiver that is distinctly separated from the registration information.
Emergency Contacts

• Critical for proper handling of incidents to ensure that someone is notified in a timely manner.
Caps and Numbers

- High Visibility Caps
- Categories
- Number Corresponds to Emergency Info
- Highly Visible Numbering
Swimmer Pre-swim Safety Meeting

• This is a “must do” and should be mandatory for all swimmers before any organized open water swim. Be sure they are visibly and audibly accessible to all.
Share a Course Map with All Participants

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Cover actual “race time” water conditions and potential changes

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Cover start/finish procedures, potential hazards and other tips
Cover Lifeguard/Safety Monitor locations and getting assistance

• What they look like, where they will be station and how to get their attention if you need help
Evacuate/Postpone/Cancel/Modify

• Evacuation Points

• Postponements

• Cancellations

• Modifications

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Plan for Potential Situations

• Heat and/or cold
• Tired swimmers
• Distressed swimmers
• Heart attack/stroke/seizure
• Marine life
• Cuts, bumps, bruises and abrasions
• In over their head

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Heat and Cold Emergencies

• Temperature collars are being adopted by many governing bodies.

• What is too cold? Some suggest: 16 degrees Celsius or 60.8 degrees Fahrenheit

• What is too warm? Some suggest: 29.45 degrees Celsius or 85 degrees Fahrenheit

• Open water swims must have a heating and cooling plan in place!

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Tired and Distressed Swimmers

- What is the difference between a tired swimmer and a distressed swimmer?

  • Tired swimmer
    - Lower elbows, dragging arms
    - Change from horizontal to diagonal body position
    - Slowed forward progress

  • Distressed swimmer
    - Vertical body position
    - Head back
    - Arms grasping or waving for help
    - Unable to call for help
“The Big Three”

- Heart Attacks
- Strokes
- Seizures

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Marine Life
Cuts, Bumps, Bruises, Abrasions

- Ice, water and bandages
- First Aid Station versus Paramedics
In Over Their Head?

• Swimmer Preparedness and Duty to Warn!

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Thank You

Next Webinar Sunday, July 20, 2014
7:00pm Eastern

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