

Open Water Event Management

Presented at the USAS Convention

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Friday, October 2, 2015

Part One:

Getting Started
Planning your
Open Water Swim

General Sanction Information

- Sanctioning events is a fundamental function of the LMSC.
- The LMSC must ensure that event hosts follow the requirements of article 203, “Sanctioning of Open Water Events”, in the USMS rule book.
- http://www.usms.org/admin/lmschb/gto_sanc_general.pdf

Sanctioning is Quality Control

- USMS, through the LMSC, has an obligation to its swimmers to ensure a safe, well-run, and properly reported event. The LMSC sanctions chair should note past performance of meet hosts and call attention to previous deficiencies.
- Further sanctions may be denied to an organization that fails in its obligation to conduct events in accordance with applicable USMS swimming rules and administrative regulations, stated information on the entry form.

The LMSC Sanctions Chair

- Each LMSC should have a sanctions chair responsible for the sanctioning process, including early scheduling to avoid conflicts, oversight at the event, and follow-up to ensure meet results are submitted in a proper and timely manner.
- It is preferable for an LMSC to also have an Open Water Chair.
- There must be good two-way communication between event hosts and the sanctions chair.

The Sanctions Packet

The LMSC should have a sanctions packet for organizations requesting sanction. This packet should include:

- A summary of the sanction process & requirements.
- Guidelines for preparing all forms, including the entry form, safety plan, and event results.
- Information for accessing the online sanction application, the required method of sanctioning all events. There are links to completing the form on the first page of the form.
- Certificates of insurance (if requested).
- “Report of Occurrence” form (used to report ALL incidents).

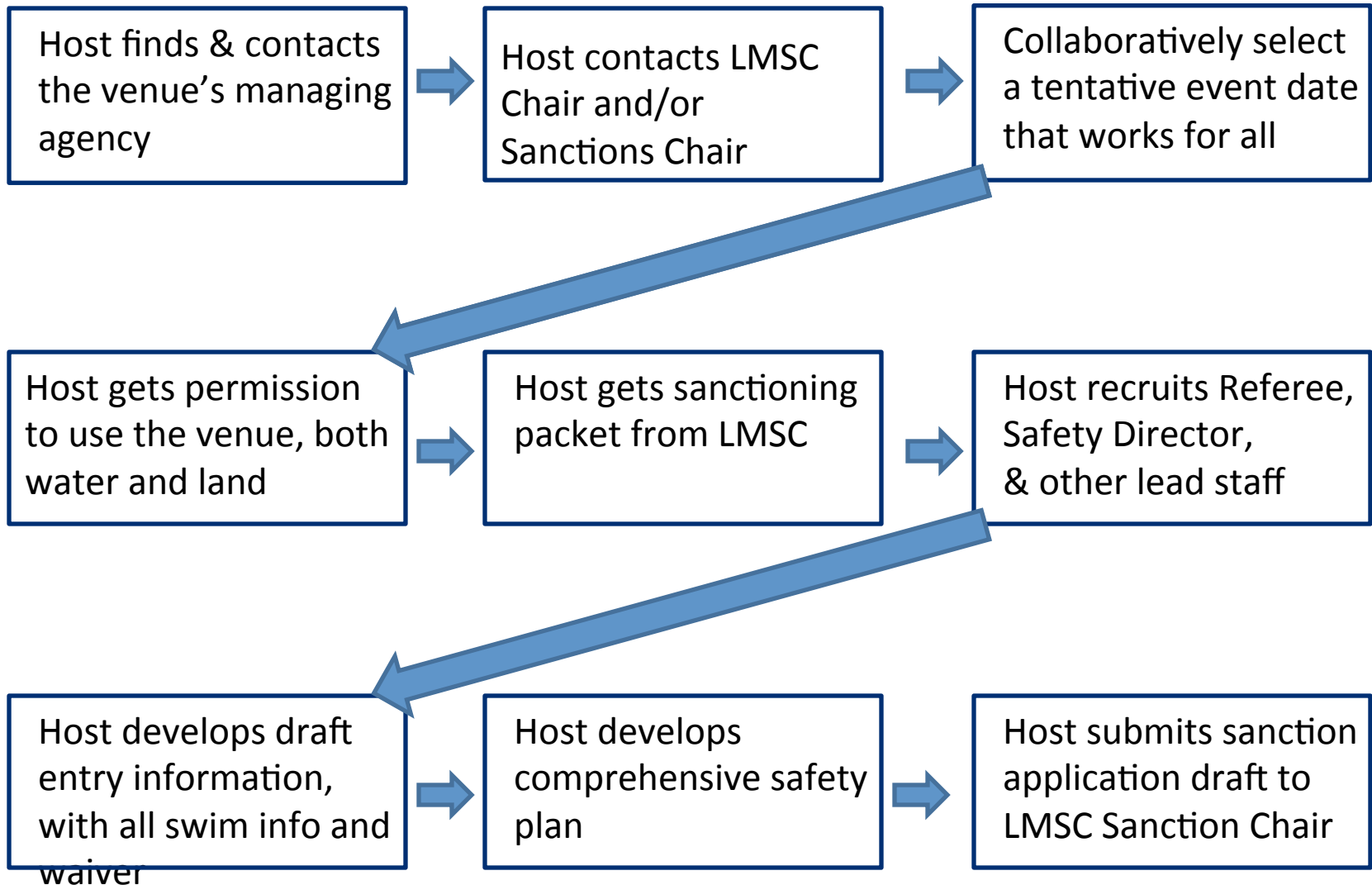
Information: The USMS Rule Book

- Event hosts are required to have a copy of the current USMS rule book at all events.
- All registered USMS clubs receive a copy of the rule book. Event hosts may obtain a rule book from the USMS National Office for \$10.
- The USMS Open Water and Long Distance Rules are found in Part 3 of the rule book.
- Event Directors must make themselves familiar with these rules.

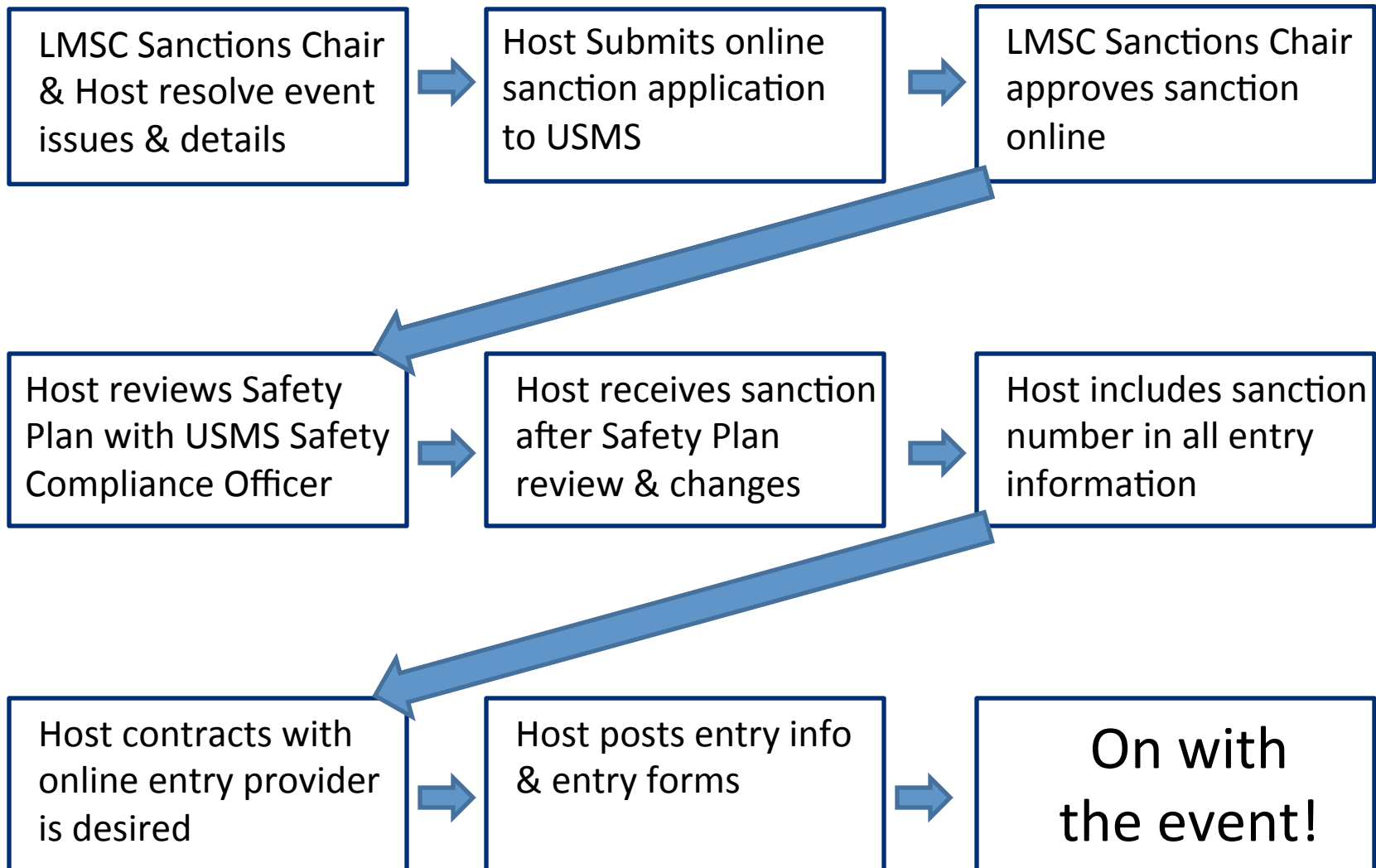
Information: The USMS Open Water Guide to Operations

- http://www.usms.org/gto_longdist
 - OW 101 – Sanction Management
 - OW 102 – Mandatory Safety Regulations
 - OW 103 – Insurance Requirements (this may change after legislation at Convention)
- Event Directors must make themselves familiar with these guidelines.

Sanctioning Flowchart: Part 1



Sanctioning Flowchart: Part 2



Select a Venue



Selecting the right venue is probably the most important decision that event organizers make relating to safety, success, and swimmer satisfaction.

Venue Considerations: Non-Water

- Location
- Support from the governing authority
- Permitting process
- Transportation routes
- Parking
- Amenities
- Local safety & medical services

Venue Considerations: Water

- Typical water temperature and conditions for that time of year
- Probable weather factors
- Possible marine life
- A safe start & finish area
- Proximity of amenities to start & finish area
- Course lay-out & potential hazards
- Safety services & monitoring

Get Permission to use the Venue



Entry Information: Part 1

- Date, time, location, host, sanction number
- Event Director & contact information
- Entry instructions & deadlines
- Eligibility—who can swim.
- Entries, fees, & process
- Divisions
- Safety

Entry Information: Part 2

- Check-in process & day-of-race registration
- Course description
- Equipment—what is allowed & not allowed
- Directions to the venue
- Parking instructions & fees
- Links to on-line entries, local information, etc.
- Anything else

Registration Information

- Registration process & fees must be included in event information.
- Registration must include the USMS liability waiver with proper wording.
- Consider online and/or paper options.
- Include electronic or ink signature.

Sanction & Insurance Fees

These are on the docket at this Convention, so this will have to be completed once we know the final fees and procedures for paying them.

Event Staffing Overview

- The event staffing presented here is an example of an event management structure.
- Every event has its own needs.
- Your event may not do things exactly as this model shows. Don't worry! You have much flexibility in choosing your operating model & details, except where dictated by USMS Rules & Administrative Regulations

Staffing: The Mandatory Big Four

Required by USMS Rule 303.8

- Event Director: Primary Responsibility to organize, manage, and oversee the entire event.
- Safety Director: Primary Responsibility to provide a safe event for all participants.
- Referee: Primary Responsibility to provide a fair event for all swimmers.
- Independent Safety Monitor: Represents the LMSC to assure that the approved safety plan is implemented and that adequate safety precautions are in place for existing conditions.

Role of the Event Director

The Event Director organizes, manages, and oversees the entire event, except where specific responsibilities are given to other officials under USMS Rules & Administrative Regulations. These duties include...

- Finding & securing the venue.
- Contacting LMSC Sanction Chair to get on schedule & obtain sanction.
- Applying for sanction & necessary permits.
- Compiling event information & create forms.
- Recruiting & managing all event staff (such as Safety Director, Clerk of Course, Volunteer Coordinator, Announcer, & all marshal, hospitality, awards, etc., staff required for the event).
- Obtaining all technical assistance.
- Doing whatever else it takes!

Role of the Safety Director

Works with and is responsible to the Event Director for all aspects of safety, also working with...

- Referee
- Medical Officer
- All responders
- Safety monitors
- Safety Crews
- Escort Craft
- Medical personnel (EMS)

And provides safety...

- Equipment
- Training
- Communication



The position of Safety Director cannot be combined with the duties of any other official or staff member (USMS Rule 303.8.1)

Role of the Referee

As the head official, the Referee is responsible for the conduct of the swim itself, and works with the Event Director and Safety Director to plan, conduct, and conclude the event. These duties include...

- Briefing, positioning, & supervising race officials (such as assistant referee, starter, course judges, finish judges, timers, & recorders).
- Performing the pre-race briefing for swimmers.
- Managing the swim.
- Keeping an eye towards participant safety & event fairness.
- Doing whatever else it takes!

Role of the Independent Safety Monitor:

Required Starting in 2016

- “An Independent Safety Monitor shall be approved by the LMSC sanctioning officer and shall be independent of the event organizing body.” It is an LMSC position & function.
- “The Independent Safety Monitor shall be present at the event to assure (1) that the approved safety plan is implemented and (2) that adequate safety precautions are in place for existing conditions.”
- “The Independent Safety Monitor shall have the authority to revoke the sanction on the day of the swim if adequate safety precautions are not in place, and shall notify all participants of the revocation before the beginning of the swim if the event organizer proceeds with the swim.”

Part Two:

Running a Safe Open Water Swim

The Safety Plan: Looking at the Big Picture

- A well-considered and comprehensive safety plan is your roadmap to a safe swim.
- Starting in 2016, a safety plan application must be completed on the USMS safety plan application template & submitted with your sanction application.
- A safety plan approved by USMS is required for sanction.
- An enhanced thermal plan is a part of the Safety Plan Application and is required for all swims in potentially cold water.

Safety Plan & Checklist Documents

- Details of safety planning are found in the OWGTO Part 2: Safety Guidelines
- These Safety Guidelines also include:
 - Addendum A: Safety Plan Application
 - Addendum B: Safety Directors Checklist
 - Addendum C: Boat Operator Checklist
- Both application & checklists are valuable management tools for event safety staff

Preparing & Staffing for Safety

- Understand that the Event Director & Safety Director have different roles.
- Plan from the beginning with safety in mind.
- Plan for situations with medical consequences, such as hypo/hyperthermia, heart attack, seizure, stroke, marine life altercations, band-aid first aid, etc., as well as tired/distressed/in-over-their head swimmers.
- Prepare the safety plan carefully
- Put the safety plan into operation

Overlapping Areas of Responsibility

- Swimmers take a large degree of responsibility for themselves.
- Spotters watch swimmers.
- Rescuers watch spotters.
- Medical Staff watch rescuers.
- Safety Director watches everybody.

Warning, Disclaimer, Waiver

- Aquatics is a high risk activity
- Event hosts have a duty to warn and protect participants.
- Swimmers must acknowledge risk & take personal responsibility



Emergency Contacts

- Everything I ever needed to know about emergency contacts I learned on a Kindergarten field trip...
- An emergency contact should be specified on all event entries.
- Contacts should be easily accessible on the race site.

CONFIDENTIAL **Emergency Contact Information**

Date: _____

Name: _____ Special Needs: _____

Name: _____ Special Needs: _____

Home Address _____ Telephone _____

Cell Number(s) _____ Email Address _____

Pets: _____

Party with key to **YOUR** address:

#1 Name _____ Relationship: _____

Home Address _____

Telephone Number _____ Cell Number(s) _____

#2 Name _____ Relationship: _____

Home Address _____

Telephone Number _____ Cell Number(s) _____

Next of Kin:

#1 Name _____ Relationship: _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____ Cell Number(s) _____

#2 Name _____ Relationship: _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____ Cell Number(s) _____

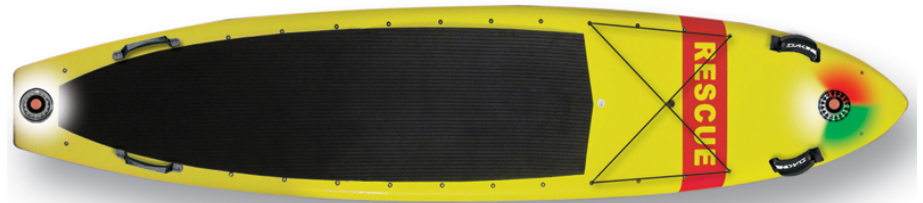
On Site Considerations

- EMS – on site!
- Appropriate craft (non-motorized or motorized) and staff
- Safety gear
- Communications gear
- Safety staff positioning
- Safety staff training & briefing
- Accounting for swimmers
- Hazards—remove or mark them

EMS Must Be On Site!



Select Appropriate Craft: Non-motorized and Motorized



Non-Motorized Craft: Spotters

- Spotters job is to watch swimmers, with rescue an option with proper craft & training.
- Craft: rowboats, kayaks, paddleboards, etc.
- Staff: Use professional or certified staff if possible, but trained volunteers are OK.
- Lifejackets and other safety & communications gear are mandatory.
- Distractions (i.e. earbuds, etc.) are forbidden.
- Individual escorts should be considered as personal spotters.

Motorized Watercraft: Rescuers and/or Spotters

- All motorized craft used in USMS sanctioned open water events **MUST** have a propeller guard (note exceptions) or a dedicated Swimmer Monitor in the craft to assist the boat operator in watching swimmers.
- Propeller guards must be of a design that protects swimmers from propeller strikes

Examples of allowable propeller guards



Example of disallowable propeller guard



Exceptions to mandatory propeller guard requirements

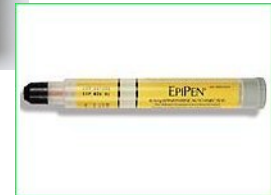
- Boats owned and operated by or on behalf of Coast Guard, police, fire and rescue, or other government agencies;
- Boats at anchor from start to finish of the sanctioned event, with engines off while any swimmer is in the water;
- Boats with propellers fore of the rudder (e.g. “inboard motors”)

Boats with propellers fore of the rudder may be used, provided...

- These boats do not run directly on the designated swim course
- For events requiring personal escort craft, water craft with inboard motors may be allowed on the course provided their engines are off when any swimmer is within 20 feet of the propeller and during relay exchanges.
- For feedings the swimmer may approach within 5 feet of the bow or side of the boat with engines engaged.

Safety Gear

- Lifeguards use rescue tubes...
- Trained personnel (not just EMS) may use:
 - Rescue tubes
 - AED
 - Oxygen
 - Spinal Board
 - Epi Pen



Communications Gear

- Establish a communications plan that is effective but easy to use.
- Usual communications gear:
 - Cell phones (where coverage is available)
 - Two-way radios
 - Whistles & horns
 - Flags
- The announcer should have a role in the plan.

Spotter & Rescuer Placement

Spotters & Rescuers must operate under a plan to cover the course where the swimmers are:

- Zone
- Accordion
- Combo
- Individual escort



Spotter & Rescuer Training

- Spotters & rescuers need to have competent skills for their craft.
- Spotters & rescuers need safety training for all areas of their position.



Safety Staff Pre-race Briefing



- Event Procedures
- Assistance duties
- Response & care duties
- Equipment
- Positioning
- Communication
- Evacuation
- Cancellation

Swimmer Supervision

- “Big Eye” Theory
- What is your Response & Care Objective?
- Accounting for swimmers



Accounting for Swimmers

- Actual number who go in MUST match actual number who come out (landings = take-offs)!
- Establish check-in & check-out procedure
- Define in pre-race meeting
- Swimmers must comply
- It would be so easy to lose or miscount one!



Caps and Numbers

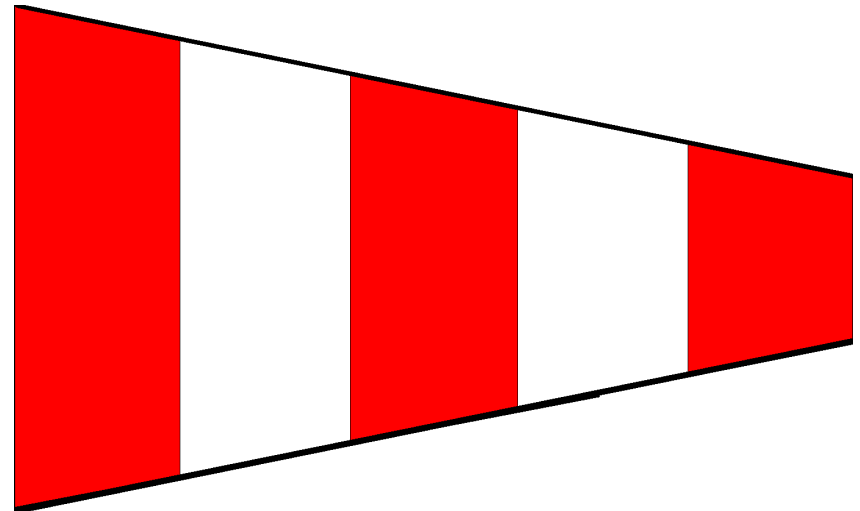
- Wear High Visibility Caps
- Number visibly (3" or larger)
- Number linked to emergency info
- Categories?



Major Changes to Plan

Major changes are usually caused by unusual events. Plan for the probable:

- Postponements
- Modifications
- Evacuation
- Cancellations



Part Three:

Running a Fair & Fun
Open Water Swim

Planning

- Beyond safety planning, all planning should be aimed at creating a festive, memorable, and fun experience for the swimmers.
- Often small details make a big impression, but all details make the biggest impression.
- Create a schedule and stick to it if conditions make it possible.
- When in doubt, make it fun!

A Typical Race Day

- Physical set-up
- Check-in & briefing for Registration & Hospitality Staff
- Registration opens for swimmers
- Safety & Operations Staff meetings
- Warm-up opens
- Swimmer Pre-race Meeting
- Swimmer accounting
- Race
- Results & Awards

Registration

- Registration is the first contact point for swimmers on race day—no surprises or hassles!
- Staff should be well trained & prepared to handle all inquiries & situations with a smile.
- Overstaff if possible—keep lines short.
- Process should be as simple and streamlined as possible—consider pre-packaging everything.
- Remember that registration data is linked to results & awards data—be accurate.

Hospitality

True Fact: Swimmers love to eat & socialize!

- Provide modest pre-race & post-race snacks.
- Provide cold & hot beverages at all times.
- Consider a post-race meal:
 - This is a major planning & staffing item, but also a major feature in branding your event.
 - Consider vegetarian options.
 - Consider box lunch options.
- Treat swimmers as your family, because they are.

Race Operations: Timing & Judging

- Accurate timing & judging is essential to hosting a fair swim.
- Select staff who are nimble of brain, quick in action, and hard to fluster.
- Strive for fast results, but slow & accurate trump fast & incorrect every time.
- Always have back-up! Always have back-up!
- Consider chip timing, remembering that non-chip back-up is required.

Pre-race Briefing

- Accessible to all, visibly & audibly.
- Swimmers need to pay attention.
- In order, the Referee discusses...
 - Safety: personal and procedures
 - The course & real-time conditions
(have course map visible)
 - Start & finish procedures
 - Accountability procedures
 - Time remaining before start
- Use a written outline.



Results & Awards

- Post accurate results as quickly as possible.
- Allow time for results-based protests.
- Plan a suitable awards ceremony promptly.
- Fill possible dead time before results are ready with VIP introductions, announcements of future events, raffles, any anything else of interest to the swimmers.

After the Race, Finish the Work

- Review & distribute the results.
- Follow up on any immediate issues.
- Return, clean, inventory, & store all gear specific to the event.
- Pay the bills & complete the accounting.
- Complete all necessary paperwork.
- Take the time to thank everyone who helped.
- Start planning next year.

Evaluate the Event

Great swims are built on cumulative experience. Never lose the opportunity to build & use this.

- Observe & take notes during the event.
- Survey the swimmers.
- Solicit comments from all staff.
- Meet & review event with management staff.
- Write everything down.
- Use the best ideas next time around.

Let's Go
Swimming!