



USMS Open Water Guide to Operations

Part 2: Open Water Safety Guidelines

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This document contains the safety guidelines for open water sanctioned events, training and clinics.

About U.S. Masters Swimming

U.S. Masters Swimming, founded in 1970, is a membership-operated national governing body that promotes health, wellness, fitness and competition for adults through swimming. It does so by partnering with more than 1,500 adult swim programs across the country; promoting information via the bimonthly member magazine, *SWIMMER*, monthly e-newsletters, *STREAMLINES*, and website, usms.org; and by sanctioning and promoting pool, open water and virtual events and competitions. More than 55,000 adults are registered members of U.S. Masters Swimming.

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Article OW-201: USMS Open Water Activities

OW-201.1 Introduction

OW-201.1.1 Because conditions and courses vary, there is no specific set of requirements that applies to every open water activity. **The following information represents USMS' expectations for performance for all USMS open water sanctioned events.**

OW-201.1.2 In addition to the expectations covered in this part, there are mandatory requirements that are subject to oversight from the Open Water Compliance Coordinator (OWCC), including OWGTO Part 1: Sanction Guidelines and USMS Rule Book Part 2: Administrative Regulations.

OW-201.1.3 Although the safety of swimmers is the primary concern of every USMS open water event, safety planning should also include all event staff.

OW-201.2 Venue

OW-201.2.1 Course Design—The swim course should be designed to minimize confusion and unnecessary contact among swimmers. Hazards should be avoided, removed or clearly marked.

OW-201.2.2 Start—The start should be safe for all swimmers. Starting officials and signals should be easy to see and hear.

OW-201.2.3 Turn/Course Markers—The course should be designed and marked so that the path to follow is clear to swimmers.

OW-201.2.4 Finish—The finish should be safe for swimmers, easy to navigate, conducted to ensure sportsmanship and staffed to aid swimmers if necessary while they are exiting the water.

OW-201.3 Maps/Diagrams

Detailed maps and diagrams should be available for participants and event officials. The size and number of maps should be appropriate for the venue and number of participants.

OW-201.3.1 Site Map—The site map should show the event "Nerve Center," evacuation points, first aid station, restrooms, and other amenities.

OW-201.3.2 Emergency Medical Services—The event host should provide printed directions and maps to off-site EMS services.

OW-201.4 Water and Environmental Conditions

OW-201.4.1 Water Quality—The water at the venue should meet local or state water quality standards for swimming.

OW-201.4.2 Local and Seasonal Trends—Local and seasonal trends for environmental conditions should be considered as part of safety planning and event management.

OW-201.5 Participant Safety

Because conditions and courses vary, each participant (any person involved with the event) bears the responsibility of knowing and following safety standards for protection from foreseeable

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dangers. The participant and event director can both contribute to swimmer safety by observing the following:

OW-201.5.1 Waiver/Disclaimer/Warning—Swimmers shall sign the USMS waiver of liability.

OW-201.5.2 Emergency Contacts—Swimmers should provide contact information in case of an emergency.

OW-201.5.3 Swimmer Identification—The event director should provide a marking system for swimmer identification that is placed on the body (on a limb, hand and/or upper back/shoulders).

OW-201.5.4 Swimmer Visibility—The event director should provide a system to enhance swimmer visibility on the water.

OW-201.5.5 Participant Safety Briefing—The event host must provide a public briefing, required for all participants, before the start of each swim.

OW-201.5.6 Postpone/Cancel/Modify—The event host should have a plan for participant management if the event needs to be postponed, cancelled or modified.

OW-201.5.7 Plan for Potential Situations—The event host should have a plan for avoiding or mitigating potential situations.

OW-201.6 Staffing for Safety

Sufficient safety personnel should be present to support the size and conditions of the event, trained for their job and able to communicate with each other.

OW-201.6.1 Safety Director—All safety issues should be assigned to the safety director, who should have sufficient authority to ensure that safety directives are observed and enforced. The safety director should have no other duties and should not participate in swims, clinics or any other activity offered at the event while swimmers are in the water.

OW-201.6.2 EMS Services—There should be appropriate medical equipment, and licensed personnel qualified to use that equipment, at the event site for the duration of the event.

OW-201.6.3 On-Water Course Monitors—On-water craft should be assigned and distributed so the entire field of swimmers is covered visually at all times during the race and during warm-ups/cool-downs on the course, and ensure that non-event boat traffic is blocked from the course.

OW-201.6.4 Escort and Pilot Craft—Selection of the type of escort craft to use shall be at the discretion of the event director and should be appropriate for the conditions of the swim. The use of individual escorts is at the discretion of the event director. Management of escort craft should be conducted in a manner that is safe and fair to all swimmers. Use of motorized water craft as escorts and pilots shall be subject to the mandatory safety regulations defined in Article OW-102: Mandatory Safety Regulations (*OWGTO Part 1: Sanction Guidelines*).

OW-201.6.5 Monitor Craft—Course monitor numbers, type and placement should be consistent with the length and configuration of the course and the number and capability of swimmers. A sweeper or cleanup boat should follow the last swimmer.

OW-201.6.6 Evacuation Craft—Evacuation craft should move swimmers off the course when necessary and bring them to land or to motorized emergency evacuation craft.

OW-201.6.7 Safety Patrol Craft—Safety patrol craft should be placed outside the course to keep craft not associated with the swim off the course.

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OW-201.6.8 Pre-race Safety Briefing—The event director should ensure that safety officials know their jobs and place in the safety planning by presenting a required pre-race safety briefing.

OW-201.6.9 Safety Monitor Training—The event director should ensure that monitors are trained before assisting swimmers. If the venue has lifeguard services for hire, it is highly recommended that events use the available services.

OW-201.6.10 Safety Gear—Safety gear should be consistent with all anticipated hazards and situations that may be encountered during the event.

OW-201.7 Swimmer Supervision and Management

The event director should develop a means to account for each swimmer and plan for the safety of swimmers with disabilities.

OW-201.7.1 Layers of Surveillance—The event host should establish means of implementing safety that enables safety workers to have continuous back-up for their jobs.

OW-201.7.2 Response and Care Objectives—Safety planning should identify response and care objectives for swimmer supervision including: a) What is your goal for swimmer safety; b) How will you respond to emergencies and in what timeframe? c) What level of care will be given after the response?

OW-201.7.3 Qualifying Standards—At the discretion of the event director, qualifying standards may be used to ensure that swimmers are capable of completing the swim distance within a reasonable time.

OW-201.7.4 Time Limits—At the discretion of the event director, pre-determined time limits may be set that enable event staff to remove swimmers from the water after a specific point in time.

OW-201.8 Swimmers with Disabilities

In events with swimmers with disabilities (blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, cognitively disabled and/or physically disabled) the referee shall inform all course officials and safety personnel of the swimmers, their disabilities and any modifications that allow the swimmers to participate.

OW-201.8.1 Blind and Visually Impaired

- A) **Start** –Each swimmer may have a guide for assistance from the start area onto the course. The guides may maintain physical contact with the swimmers throughout the start.
- B) **On course** – Each swimmer may have an in-water guide or an individual escort watercraft. The in-water guide or escort watercraft must be preapproved by the event director. In-water guides may be tethered to the swimmers or in physical contact with the swimmers. In-water guides shall not provide propulsive aid to the swimmers. Individual escort watercraft may communicate with the swimmers by voice, amplified voice, wireless communication and/or tapper. Individual escort watercraft shall not interfere with other swimmers nor, without the express consent of the event director, provide aid to their swimmers that is not available to all swimmers.
- C) **Finish** – Each swimmer may have a guides for assistance from the course through the finish. The guides may maintain physical contact with the swimmers throughout the finish.

Part 2: Open Water Safety Guidelines**OW-201.8.2 Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

- A) **Briefing** — The event shall convey event and safety information to the swimmers through written materials, deaf signers or other appropriate methods.
- B) **Start** – The starter shall use the modified start protocol for deaf swimmers as defined in USMS Rules Article 108.
- C) **On course** – No modifications are required. Lifeguards and course monitors should be informed there are swimmers who may not be able to respond to verbal commands.
- D) **Finish** – No modifications are required.

OW-201.8.3 Cognitively Disabled

- A) **Start** – Each swimmer may have a guide for assistance from the start area onto the course.
- B) **On course** – Each swimmer may have an untethered in-water guide or escort watercraft which must be preapproved by the event director. In-water guides and escort watercraft shall not provide propulsive aid to the swimmers.
- C) **Finish** – Each swimmer may have a guide for assistance from the course through the finish.

OW-201.8.4 Physical Disabilities

- A) Start – Swimmers may receive physical assistance from the start area onto the course.
- B) On course – No modifications are required.
- C) Finish – Swimmer may receive physical assistance from the course through the finish.

OW-201.8.5 In-Water Guides and Individual Escort Watercraft

- A) All in-water guides and operators of escort watercraft shall be considered event safety officials and must attend the pre-race safety briefing and the pre-race swimmers briefing.

OW-201.9 Communication

OW-201.9.1 Written Communication Plan—A written communication plan should be prepared and included in the safety plan, defining the methods whereby critical event officials communicate among themselves and with all participants and swimmers at the venue.

OW-201.10 Emergency Action Plans

OW-201.10.1 Written Action Plans—Written action plans should be prepared and included in the safety plan.

OW-201.10.2 Medical Evacuation Plan—The safety plan should include detailed procedures and methods of transport for participants needing emergency medical aid from water pickup to land-based medical services.

OW-201.10.3 Event Cancellation or Postponement Plans—A written event cancellation or postponement plan should be included in the overall safety plan.

OW-201.11 Licensing/Sanctioning

Event directors should observe required sanctioning, licensing and permit requirements that may be imposed by USMS and governing bodies, facility operators, private owners and enforcement agencies.

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