

Two Guards on Duty: Why It's Important and How to Get There

When talking with customers about the importance of having two guards on duty, we hear many questions:

- Does having two guards on duty at all times truly make pools safer?
- How can we implement this strategy within budget?
- Will we be able to recruit and retain enough qualified lifeguards?
- How will I secure buy-in from my board members and staff?

These questions are valid. And you're not alone in facing these challenges.

For more than two decades, Redwoods has dedicated our efforts to helping organizations like yours ensure the safety of the communities they serve. When it comes to aquatics, we strongly believe having two lifeguards on duty at all times is invaluable to a pool's ability to operate effectively, avoid incidents and protect life.

Redwoods' Best Practice

Every pool at every organization is staffed with two lifeguards on duty at all times.

Here's why:

- Most lifeguards are only trained to perform two-guard rescues
- One lifeguard on duty does not allow for adequate breaks or rotations
- Contacting emergency services will be significantly delayed without a second guard on duty, readily available
- A second lifeguard can address safety concerns, perform other duties (moving lap lanes, performing swim tests) and even step in to guard when a DROP drill is performed with the on-surveillance lifeguard.
- Effective CPR and backboard extraction methods require two people

“*Having two guards allows the on-surveillance lifeguard to maintain singularity of purpose while the non-surveillance lifeguard can perform non-surveillance tasks. In an emergency, there will be appropriate resources to prudently respond and provide appropriate care.*”

Michael Oostman
Oostman Aquatic Safety Consulting

Considerations to help assess your approach to aquatics safety

If you find yourself in a situation where you choose to have one guard on duty, consider the following:

- Which times of the day or week do you have only one guard on duty?
- What factors make it difficult to have two guards during these times?
- What does your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) look like with only one guard on duty?
- Is your lifeguard able to effectively respond within 20 seconds?
- Do your in-service trainings include realistic scenarios where the lifeguard in a solo lifeguard shift practices their skills alone, absent of other supporting guards?

“*Labor is costly, but avoiding a drowning is priceless. Luckily, we have found a way to staff a minimum of two guards on our pool deck. And I am convinced we have avoided certain tragedy by doing that.*”

Kathy Fisher, Aquatics Director
Randolph YMCA

Steps to move toward a two-guard strategy

Once you’ve identified the times when you only have one guard on duty, there are incremental steps you can take to move toward having two guards on duty:

1. Set expectations among all staff members so they each know their responsibilities and how they can best support the lifeguard when on the pool deck or waterfront.
2. Add a non-lifeguard staff member to the deck to serve as a secondary responder—they can provide essential support like pushing the emergency call button, calling 9-1-1 or retrieving medical equipment.
3. Cross-train staff to serve as a second lifeguard during peak times. Start with training a few counselors in lifeguarding during the summer.
Note: All guards—even those cross-trained—should attend monthly in-service trainings to keep skills sharp.
4. Test a two-guard approach during just one of the times you identified. Starting small, during one specific time, can still save lives without adding significant cost.

“*Our aquatics program is built around the foundation that we will provide an atmosphere where patrons can enjoy aquatics programs in a safe and fun environment for life. That is why we staff at minimum two rescue-ready guards at all times.*”

Tammy Miller, Senior VP of
Risk Management
Florida First Coast YMCA

For an assessment of your aquatics safety strategy and to brainstorm solutions, contact your Redwoods consultant.

Have a creative approach to aquatics safety that your organization is currently using? We want to hear about it.

Email us at community@redwoodsgroup.com