

A survey of hotels in Langkawi Island, Malaysia, on the need for lifeguards

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As no legislation exists in Malaysia regarding the compulsory employment of lifeguards in public beaches or pools, quite often the initiative to provide lifeguards lies with the local authority or private enterprise.

Langkawi island is a popular tourist destination for local and overseas visitors. Via the phone, 34 hotels/motels in Langkawi were contacted in 2003 and nine simple questions were posed to the Human Resource Manager/General Manager or the Guest Relations Officer.

The results show that 60% of the hotels/motels had swimming pools. 80% of these 60% were less than 100 meters from the beach. Only 38% of the pools had lifeguards. All of them had as minimum qualification the Bronze Medallion certificate and were CPR trained. Only two hotels had both pool and beach lifeguards. All responders agreed that beach lifeguards were needed in Langkawi. On a ranking of 1 (least needed) to 10 (definitely needed), all hotels ranked 7–10 for the need for beach lifeguards, and 1–10 for pool lifeguards. 50% of the hotels were of the opinion that they themselves should provide beach lifeguards, whereas 32% felt that the local council should be responsible, and 18% felt that the Ministry of Tourism should be responsible. Two hotel General Managers said 'no lifeguards are required for pools less than 1.4m deep'.

The survey highlights a degree of ignorance of the risks of drowning among hotels in Langkawi. Providing correct information to those involved is crucial. As most of drownings in Malaysia occur in the rural areas as well as in the sea, well trained beach lifeguards are a reassuring sight for tourists and locals alike. One way of improving this situation is to collaborate with the National Hotel Association to disseminate information to their members. Local government councils should also be approached regarding beach safety as the beaches in Malaysia are under their authority. Proper training of lifeguards are important. The paper will discuss some of the remedial steps taken by the Life Saving Society Malaysia. Many of the lifesaving societies in the nations of South East Asia may be encountering similar problems.

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