

Assessing the application of safety standards in Australian aquatic facilities

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Introduction

The Guidelines for Safe Pool Operation (GSPO) was first published by Royal Life Saving in 1991 and is widely considered the minimum standard for safety in commercial and public swimming pools across Australia. Royal Life Saving uses the Aquatic Facility Safety Assessment (AFSA) to assess the application of the GSPO in facilities based on 227 questions across 12 sections covering aquatic facility design and operations.

Aims

1. To provide a measure of the current application of standards by industry compared with previous years.
2. To identify specific areas of concern from the results of the AFSA's conducted over the three years to March, 2010.
3. To assess the value of a regular policy of regular external auditing via the AFSA.

Method

Royal Life Saving utilises an automated system to complete the AFSA and results are uploaded to a web server. The data was collated from the results of AFSA's conducted between 1 April 2008 and 31 March, 2010. Random samples of one hundred facilities were selected for the twelve month periods of 1 April, 2007 to 31 March, 2008 (2008), 1 April, 2008 to 31 March, 2009 (2009) and 1 April, 2009 to 31 March, 2010 (2010). A statistical analysis was completed to identify key measures of facility performance.

Results

The results demonstrated an increase in the mean compliance from 2008 to 2010. Of the five core sections of the AFSA activated by all facilities, including the Administration, First Aid, Technical Operations, Facility Design and General Supervision sections, four demonstrated a trend of continual improvement. Technical Operations showed a decline in mean compliance from 2009 to 2010 and it was identified that this may be attributed to signage related questions. Questions assessing the use of signage in aquatic facilities consistently reported compliance 10% lower than the mean compliance for all assessments. In many cases, signage often failed to meet the minimum standards for compliance as outlined in the GSPO. Facilities that had undertaken regular assessments demonstrated continual improvements over the three year period. Facilities assessed every year reported a mean compliance in 2010 16.1% higher than those facilities assessed for the first time. The most significant improvement in results was demonstrated in the second assessment; however each subsequent assessment continued to show improvement.

Discussion

The results demonstrate a continued improvement in the application of safety standards in aquatic facilities. It is, however, concerning that facilities are still non-compliant in approximately 15% of the assessment. Those facilities assessed regularly via the AFSA demonstrate the value of the AFSA in addressing compliance issues. Signage items consistently report lower results in the AFSA and therefore the process for determination of what signage is appropriate for each facility through detailed risk assessment may warrant further support by Royal Life Saving. Further research needs to look to segment results based on the different operating conditions of aquatic facilities. This will provide additional opportunities to benchmark individual performance, as well as providing a basis for future policy development. Any future study should also look to validate these results as representative of the entire Australian aquatics industry by utilising a sample of facilities randomly selected from a range of areas, management models, operating periods and age to assert that the facilities represented in this report are representative of the entire industry.

Conclusion

The results of the AFSA over the three years have demonstrated a steady overall improvement in the level of compliance with the GSPO. Those facilities who have committed to an annual auditing process demonstrate the benefit of regular external assessments and how it assists facilities to achieve industry best practice.

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