Risk Management Considerations for Diving Boards

Swimming pools and aquatic facilities are magnets for fun, sport and recreation, but they are also a lightning rod for risk exposures. Diving remains a leading cause of sports-related spinal cord injuries worldwide, accounting for 35% of cases.[1] In Canada, an average of three people lose their lives each year due to diving incidents, with most injuries occurring in private, unsupervised settings.[1] IPE's Centre of Excellence provides several great articles on risk exposures in aquatic facilities, and this one will do a deep-dive (!) into risk management guidelines relating to diving boards and platforms.

Risk Management Considerations

1. Choose the Right Board

Good risk management starts with planning and making a well-reasoned decision as to what type of board or diving platform is suitable for a particular application:

- The board must be the right type for the pool. Each board is specifically designed for a certain pool shape, length, width and depth.
- It should be made of slip-proof, rugged material that is extremely durable. The material should be safe to use and appropriately slip-resistant.
- Use a professional installer to ensure that the board is the correct one for your pool, that it is safe and meets all code requirements.
- Be sure to understand the individual life cycle of the diving apparatus: What will enhance its life expectancy? What will shorten it? Then create a maintenance budget to optimize its safety and life span. Factor the board's end-of-life when creating budgets and how best to decommission the board before its safety is compromised.
- Keep in mind that outdoor equipment will be exposed to the elements and will degrade faster than indoor equipment. This should be factored into the life cycle of the diving board, indeed, any pool equipment used.

2. Maintain the Board

Once the correct diving board has been selected and installed, it is important to make sure it is inspected on a regular basis.

- Check the board for general wear and tear; there should be no visible cracks, scrapes, dents or other physical damage.

1 https://parachute.ca/en/injury-topic/summer-sports/diving/

- The screws holding the board to the pool deck should be firmly in place and checked for corrosion or rust regularly. Salt pools will affect corrosion differently than regular chlorinated water.
- The foundation securing the board should not be cracked. Test the board to make sure it remains firmly in place.
- Set up a daily inspection schedule before the board is used to make sure everything is in proper working condition,
- Ensure inspections are documented, and that documentation is retained.

3. Create a Safe Diving Area

The presence of a diving board and demarked diving space promotes diving into a limited area. Without them, users may be encouraged to dive into areas which are too shallow or too crowded. To control for this potentially hazardous activity, it is imperative that all areas off-limits to diving are clearly marked.

- "No diving" signs should be posted near water that is too shallow for diving (usually less than eight feet).[2]
- "No diving" signs should also be placed along the pool's edge and should clearly state that diving is only allowed from the diving board because it is safer to dive from a board than from the edge of the pool.
- Signs should be clearly posted around the pool's edge stating the depth of the water.
- Buoys or a floating rope should be used to indicate the division between the shallow and deep end of the pool.
- Clearly mark on the edge of the diving board the safest spot to dive. This reduces the risk of injury when using the board.
- Diving areas should be well-lit to ensure that divers can clearly see the area in which they are diving.
- Consider temporary diving prohibition in multi-use pools: how will you effectively control for the diving hazard? When you change the profile of the pool (from lap swimming, to lessons, to diving and free swims) there should be a process for properly and safely making those changes.
- Stair treads leading to a diving platform (or even a water slide) must have non-slip surfaces – these should be inspected regularly for wear and rejuvenated as needed.
- Stairs should be well-lit and have rails which comply with all standards and codes.

4. Regulatory Compliance

Diving boards and platforms must comply with provincial and national safety regulations to minimize risk and ensure public safety. For example, public pools in Ontario must adhere to specific requirements outlined in the **Ontario Building Code (OBC), Section 3.11.4.1**. These regulations govern the design, placement, and safety features of diving boards and platforms to reduce the likelihood of injuries. Though some examples of specific regulations are noted below, this is not a complete list. In order to create a comprehensive risk management plan for both your pool and diving apparatus, consult your own local and provincial regulations and authorities.

- Minimum Water Depth Requirements: The depth of water beneath a diving board or platform must meet specific criteria based on its height. For example:
  - A board 600 mm or less above the water requires at least 2.75 m of water depth.
  - A board between 600 mm and 1,000 mm above the water requires 3 m of water depth.
  - Boards or platforms between 1,000 mm and 3 m above the water must have a 3.65 m water depth directly below.
- Slip-Resistant Surfaces: All diving boards and platforms must have a non-slip surface to prevent falls.
- Handrails for Elevated Boards: If the board or platform is more than 600 mm (2 feet) above the water, adjacent handrails are required for safety.
- Warning Signage: When diving boards are 600 mm or lower, pools must display prominent warnings such as "DANGER – AVOID DEEP OR LONG DIVES."
- Diving Area Separation: Buoys or lane ropes should mark designated diving zones to prevent accidental entry by swimmers.

5. Diving Board Rules

Diving board safety requires both swimmers and staff to follow clear rules and responsibilities. The guidelines below outline what swimmers must do to stay safe and what staff need to enforce for a secure pool environment.

2 R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 565, s. 19(4)

Rules for Swimmers

These rules should be clearly posted near the pool entrance and diving board.

- No running, pushing, or rough play on or around the diving board.
- No diving under, through, or around objects such as flotation devices (e.g., inner tubes).
- Always wait for the previous diver to surface and exit the diving area in the water before proceeding.
- No swimming under or around the diving board while it is in use.
- No walking backward on the board.
- One person on the board at a time.
- No trick dives (e.g., flips, backward dives) due to increased risk of injury.
- No diving off the sides of the board.
- No flotation devices (e.g., water wings, flutter boards) may be worn or carried while diving.
- Do not dive alone—always ensure supervision is present.

Responsibilities for Staff

Staff are responsible for enforcing the rules, maintaining the safety of the diving area, and ensuring compliance with relevant pool regulations and operational standards. Management is responsible for both teaching and enforcement of the regulations with staff. To maintain safety standards and ensure compliance with relevant regulations, staff and management should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Staff training should follow a standardized, compliant program tailored to the employee's responsibilities.
- Clarify which role-specific responsibilities require additional training. Lifeguards assigned to monitor diving activities must understand the unique risks involved and follow the proper response and enforcement protocols.
- Understand the implications of swim clubs and racing competitions: Will they supply their own life-saving staff/volunteers? Are they properly trained for your particular facility? Will they adhere to your internal procedures for safety as well as incident reporting? Have they signed an agreement (they should) detailing their responsibilities and your expectations?
- Will the group require access to the diving board? If not, it may be advisable to restrict access while the group is using the facility. If they are going to use the diving board/platform, they must understand and comply with all the rules and requirements.
- Staff must be responsible for enforcement of safe practice around the pool deck including the diving boards and platforms:
  - they must understand what unsafe practices are,
  - be capable of enforcing safety rules and understand what the consequences of rule-breaking will be:
    - It could be that if someone, for example, is rough-housing on the pool deck or on the diving board, that the lifeguard is permitted to blow their whistle and stop the activity, but upon the second occurrence, is permitted to eject the rough-housing patron from the pool and/or restrict their future use of the facility – but this should be part of a holistic Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).
    - This escalating enforcement should be part of a practice and procedure that is part of an SOP of pool management.
    - The lifeguard's actions should be an integral function of that SOP.
- Staff should be prepared to come to the aid of a lifeguard who is having issues with enforcement of any "bad actors." Management should be prepared to call the authorities if unruly behaviour continues.

6. Proper Supervision

Diving board supervision may be required at all times, but when diving boards are "open," all on-deck staff must be aware of it: If the platform, for instance, had been cordoned off for cleaning and is about to be reopened, all staff should be informed for operational awareness. Conversely, if the platform is restricted or closed and on-deck staff see it being used, then appropriate enforcement should be acted upon immediately.

Management may choose to restrict diving board/platform usage to particular hours. If that is the case, all staff must be prepared to enforce those restrictions and report any misuse.

- Even if a platform (with stairs) is restricted, lifeguard staff should inspect the stair area and platform deck as these spaces are often blocked from open viewing and could be a space that invites misuse or mischief.
- When the platform is in use, especially during diving or swimming competitions, the stair area should be monitored continuously.

- Ensure there are an adequate number of lifeguards on duty to cover the number of swimmers.
  - Lifeguards should be fifteen years or older, hold a current lifeguard certificate that is dated no more than two years prior to when they are acting as a lifeguard and have a copy of their certificate at the pool where they are working.[3]
  - Anticipate peak periods by being familiar with local school holidays and PD/PA days and staff for them accordingly.
- Where there is only one lifeguard on duty on the deck, every operator should ensure that there is one or more additional persons on call who are fifteen years of age or over and trained in the emergency procedures for the pool.[4]
- If the pool is to be closed when there is no lifeguard on duty, ensure that proper fencing is installed around the pool with latches and sturdy locks.

As the owner of an aquatic facility, it is incumbent upon you to be aware of the often-shifting standards and regulations that pertain to pools and aquatics. Staying up-to-date and well-informed is vital to reducing liability exposure, keeping staff and patrons safe, and extending the life of this valuable community resource.

3 National Lifeguard Lifesaving Society

4 R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 565, s. 17 (4); O. Reg. 109/23, s. 1 (1)

Further References and Resource Material

National Lifeguard Lifesaving Society

Life Saving Society
Safe use of Diving Boards, Platforms and Starting Blocks

World Aquatics
Diving Facilities Certificate Guide

World Aquatics
Diving Pool Certification

Diving Plongeon Canada Rules
Facilities And Equipment

*Don't forget to refer to the relevant manufacturer's guidance material

While Intact Public Entities Inc. does its best to provide useful general information and guidance on matters of interest to its clients, statutes, regulations and the common law continually change and evolve, vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and are subject to differing interpretations and opinions. The information provided by Intact Public Entities Inc. is not intended to replace legal or other professional advice or services. The information provided by Intact Public Entities Inc. herein is provided "as is" and without any warranty, either express or implied, as to its fitness, quality, accuracy, applicability or timeliness. Before taking any action, consult an appropriate professional and satisfy yourself about the fitness, accuracy, applicability or timeliness of any information or opinions contained herein. Intact Public Entities Inc. assumes no liability whatsoever for any errors or omissions associated with the information provided herein and furthermore assumes no liability for any decision or action taken in reliance on the information contained in these materials or for any damages, losses, costs or expenses in a way connected to it. Intact Public Entities Inc. is operated by a wholly owned subsidiary of Intact Financial Corporation. Intact Design® and Risk Management Centre of Excellence® are registered trademark of Intact Financial Corporation or its affiliates. All other trademarks are properties of their respective owners. TM & © 2025 Intact Public Entities Inc. and its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.

intact public entities