

While many family outings may be run loosely, church sponsored activities must have a variety of controls in place to protect its members and church assets, as well. To avoid tragedy, water activities require careful preparation and planning, good supervision, the implementation of safety precautions and the use of any applicable safety equipment. As we move away from the enclosed facility owned pool to a lake or river, control of the activity becomes more challenging and even more important. Ultimately as we plan for any activity we must determine if we can put the necessary safety precautions in place. *If we determine we cannot control the activity, we should not do it.* (See the Field Trip and Outing Planner under Risk Resources, Churches at [www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org).)

### **Supervision**

Poor supervision is one of the primary causes of tragic accidents during church activities, and can be the result of either insufficient supervision and the inability to observe all participants and what they are doing, or unqualified leaders for the activity undertaken. When sponsoring a water activity of any kind, provide leaders who are trained in water safety, particularly for the activity to be undertaken (i.e. swimming, boating/canoeing/watercraft safety, etc.). Ensure also that someone is a certified lifeguard by the American Red Cross. Assigned “spotters” can work closely with the lifeguard and other supervisors to monitor the activities. Obtain written permission for the activity and signed medical releases from parents and/or guardians of children under 18 who plan on participating.

Be knowledgeable of the swimming ability of each child and adult, and participation based on those abilities. Many groups use colored wristbands to identify the level of competence of swimmers. Use the “buddy system” to pair swimmers for the duration of the swim or outing to increase the “watchfulness” over each participant. Some camp facilities call for a “buddy check” every 10 to 15 minutes. Because someone who is drowning can slip below the surface in seconds, it does not replace the responsibilities of lifeguards and other supervisors. And *never* leave children unsupervised at any time, whether in the water or on land. Far too many accidents have occurred after children went off on their own during outings. NOTE: Some organizations recommend a ratio of one supervisor for every five swimmers. In addition, age restrictions for tubing vary, with one organization limiting flat-water tubing to children at least 5 years old and at least 50 pounds, while whitewater tubing is limited to youth at least 12 years old and at least 50 pounds.

Ensure that the swimming area is clean and free of debris that can cause injuries. This is more difficult in off-site activities where rocks or limbs may be lurking beneath the surface of the water. The danger increases on rivers where debris, undertows and currents can combine to trap and pull a swimmer or someone who has fallen from a raft or canoe under. Inclement weather and runoff will also greatly affect rivers and lakes. Be prepared to cancel if conditions warrant.

Clearly define the boundaries of any activity area. While part of a beach may be safe for swimming, there may be a point just beyond where rip tides are present. Children have also fallen from cliffs when they wandered off alone and got too near the edge. Do not allow horseplay.

Review activity safety requirements by certified organizations and experts, which can often be found on internet sites, but keep in mind that their requirements may be minimal and other

additional precautions may be necessary to protect the church from liability exposures. The American Camping Association also has standards for various waterfront and boating activities, which can be useful. ([www.acacamps.org](http://www.acacamps.org)).

Establish rules and regulations for the activity and for your pool. Pool rules should be posted on site and clearly visible to all using the facilities. Prohibit running on decking and do not allow jumping or diving into the shallow end or from anywhere other than an approved diving board where adequate depth is provided.

### **Safety Equipment**

Keep life saving equipment like hooks, rescue rings and tubes readily available. First aid equipment should also be provided.

Personal protective equipment must be provided as applicable to the activity. While we cannot control the use of safety equipment by an individual during personal activities, church sponsored outings must insist on its use for *all* participants. For individuals on boats, rafts, other watercraft and tubes, that includes the use of life jackets or personal floatation devices (PFDs), by everyone regardless of their swimming ability. Knocked unconscious or pulled under, there is a better chance of rescue and survival when wearing a PFD. The correct size PFD or safety equipment must be available for each participant, and it must be inspected for both condition and proper fit before each use.

Children and even adults can also be caught in pool drains. Ensure that drains and overflow systems are working properly and that grates are secured and cannot be removed by swimmers.

### **Transportation**

Getting to and from an activity carries its own risk exposures. Drivers for all church sponsored activities should have good driving records and vehicles should be well maintained and in good condition. Do not overload vehicles. Passengers must be limited to the number of available seat belts as provided by the manufacturer. Ensure that everyone buckles up! Avoid the use of 15-passenger vans. Various agencies have classified these vans as unsafe.

### **Additional Tips**

Wear tennis shoes, river sandals or other appropriate footwear on outings. Flip-flops do not afford adequate protection from sharp objects, can be slippery when wet and can easily be lost. Use sunscreen before and during each outing and when at the pool. A cap, hat or visor and sunglasses is also recommended.

Do not bring glass containers into pool areas or on outings. Some areas not only prohibit glass, but Styrofoam coolers as well. Know the regulations for the area where you plan on holding your activity. Some local jurisdictions may actually have prohibitions on the types of activities allowed at an area.

As you consider your church outing, plan carefully for a fun, safe activity.

This document is intended to provide a general view of risk control approaches to help prevent church losses. No single document could provide everything necessary to apply to all cases and circumstances or meet all legal and jurisdictional requirements. Recommendations must be tailored to individual circumstances and activities based on prudent risk control practices and responsibilities. Experts in various activities should be consulted for specific information.