



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

Vision Standard for Lifeguards/Instructors

Lifesaving Society Standard Approved by the Ontario Board of Directors, January 2004

Standard

Good visual acuity improves a lifeguard's or instructor's monitoring and scanning ability of the swimming pool, and their response time in an emergency.

Any person who assumes the role of a lifeguard or instructor in an aquatic environment should achieve and maintain the following vision standards:

- Visual acuity of 20/20 corrected with at least one eye and minimum of 20/40 corrected in the poorer eye.
- Corrective lenses to achieve 20/20 vision must be worn and be secured at all times when on duty.
- Peripheral vision of 120 degrees with both eyes used together.
- Sunglasses should be worn when lifeguarding or instructing outdoors. Recommended attributes for sunglasses include: i) tint should eliminate 98% of ultra-violet radiation and 60% of visible light, and ii) polarized lenses that block reflected light.
- Sunglasses should not be worn indoors or after dark.

Definitions

Lifeguard: A person appointed by the owner or operator to maintain surveillance over the bathers while they are on deck or in the pool and to supervise bather safety.

Peripheral vision: The area to either side of and slightly behind the eyes.

Visual acuity: A measurement of the ability to distinguish details and shapes.

Visual field: The ability of each eye to perceive objects to the side of the central area of vision. A normal visual field is said to be 180 degrees in diameter, or half a circle.

Aquatic volunteers or employees who provide direct service to vulnerable clients and who will be in a position of leadership or supervision, should be subject to a criminal reference check prior to placement in an aquatic position and throughout their employment period. At a minimum, these checks should be conducted on a random or “for cause” basis.

Background/Rationale

The Lifesaving Society trains lifeguards and instructors to react when they recognize someone in distress. Vision is often the primary sense by which this recognition is initiated.

The Lifesaving Society created this standard in consultation with the Canadian Association of Optometrists and the University of Waterloo’s School of Optometry.

Implementation

The Lifesaving Society recommends operators include this vision standard in their facility policy and procedures manual, and staff handbooks.

Staff application forms should reference this vision standard and applicants should acknowledge the requirement by confirming they meet the standard.

Operators may choose to verify this visual acuity with a test using a standardized chart of symbols and letters known as a Snellen chart.

More information may be obtained from a variety of sources. At the time of writing, an internet search of the term “Snellen chart,” produced several results, including the following website containing instructions on testing/reading procedures and Snellen charts:

<https://lowvision.preventblindness.org/2013/07/12/snellen-chart/>

Sources

- Canadian Association of Optometrists
- School of Optometry, University of Waterloo
- American Lifeguard Association, 2011
- OPP Constable Selection System, Self Assess!, Medical Requirements for Candidates
- Transport Canada, Personnel Licensing and Training, Canadian Aviation Regulations, Canadian Aviation Regulations (CARs) 2015-1

Disclaimer

Lifesaving Society Safety Standards are developed using Coroners' recommendations, the latest evidence-based research, and reflect the aquatics industry's best practices at the time the publication was approved.

The purpose of these standards is to encourage swimming pool, waterpark and waterfront owners, managers, operators and regulators to adopt these standards, in order to prevent drownings in aquatic environments.

Lifesaving Society Safety Standards do not replace or supersede local, provincial/ territorial legislation or regulations, but they are considered the standard to which aquatic facility operators should work towards, in order to enhance safety within their operations and to prevent drowning.

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