

Screening Lifeguards Trained by Another Facility

The average aquatic management staff is very busy throughout the course of their operating season. Staff training, including lifeguard courses, are often conducted at specific scheduled times that correspond to available instructor staff, pool space, and budget. Occasionally (or in some cases, frequently) a prospective employee will arrive from your Human Resources department with lifeguard credentials in hand, only needing to be given a rescue tube and pointed in the direction of the nearest vacant lifeguard stand. If you are short staffed and/or very busy, it may be tempting to do just that. However, before handing them a rescue tube, consider the following:

Are the credentials offered valid?

The prospective employee arrives with a paper or card (or set of cards) that indicates that they are in fact a lifeguard, certified or licensed to perform the duties and skills you would expect a lifeguard to do. But, does this paperwork mean anything at all if it is not valid? To ensure that the paperwork establishing the certified or licensed status of the prospective lifeguard is valid, it is necessary to investigate their origin. Questions to ask the prospective lifeguard include:

- Where did you receive this training?
- What type of facility did you work at in the past, utilizing this training?
- What was the name of the instructor or instructors of the course?
- What was the date or dates of completion?

Using this information, attempt to contact the facility and instructor to confirm that the prospective lifeguard was in fact a member of the course indicated. Confirm that they passed and have in their possession reference materials (such as course textbooks or online training access). Contact the certifying agency to see if their records show that the lifeguard has completed the courses indicated. Finally, confirm that the current date falls comfortably within the period of time that the credentials are valid. Document this investigation along with copies of the credentials you will keep on file for future reference.

Can these lifeguard credentials be used here?

There are many training agencies that issue certifications or licenses and depending upon your risk management plan, you may accept one or several. If the training agency is different than the organization you primarily use, there may be differences in protocol that may complicate or compromise your emergency action plan. Lifeguards using different techniques than those practiced during in-service will create chaos during an emergency. Even lifeguards with the same training may be accustomed to site-specific techniques that may not apply to your facility. It will be vital to normalize techniques and procedures with all lifeguards to an established standard used by the aquatics facility. This site-specific training would need to be completed in the form of an in-service that covers each emergency action plan procedure for various types of incidents to ensure a consistent standard of care. Additionally, specific training covering scanning techniques and procedures used by the aquatic facility

should be reviewed. This training should be completed before the lifeguard occupies a guard station on their own and should be documented.

Lifeguards holding a Jeff Ellis & Associates lifeguard license may not be able to utilize it away from the facility from which they received their training unless it is transferable. A lifeguard with a non-transferable license will need to retake the lifeguard course and be issued a new license or certification valid at your facility. Jeff Ellis & Associates licensed lifeguards are all recorded electronically on a secure internet database from which clients can determine if a license is valid and if it can be transferred to another facility.

The card or License says they know what they are doing, but there is only one way to know for sure!

Once you determine that the lifeguard's credentials are valid and are consistent with the techniques used at your facility, it is necessary to determine what they actually know through drills and scenarios. Begin with the prerequisites for the specific lifeguard course they originally competed to determine basic endurance and swimming skills. Ensure that they can reach the bottom of the pool with the greatest depth which they may be responsible for while on duty. Continue with subjecting the lifeguard to practical scenarios involving rescuing an active guest in distress on the surface, below the surface, and at the bottom of various pools and attractions.

Next, involve the lifeguard in team management scenarios including other lifeguards, utilizing the facility's emergency action plan. These scenarios should cover incidents such as a suspected spinal injury and an unconscious guest in various locations and depths. To ensure that the lifeguard has retained BLS skills, have them perform single rescuer CPR/AR/FBAO skills on a manikin for Adult, Child, and Infant age groups. First Aid skills should also be evaluated through practical demonstrations.

The lifeguard should be able to perform all of the skills and knowledge evaluated (both practical and written) at the same level required to pass the lifeguard course, at a minimum. It would be reasonable to expect that an experienced lifeguard would be able to exceed that minimum standard, once understanding and practice of site specific procedures and the emergency action plan has been established. It would be wise to follow up on this evaluation by having the lifeguard shadow an experienced lifeguard and to make them the subject of an internal audit shortly after being placed on duty.

Ultimately, it is you that must feel comfortable with the skills and abilities of any lifeguard who works for you, whether you trained them directly or not. *A certification states only that the card holder was capable of performing the skills required to gain the certification ON THE DAY THE CARD WAS SIGNED; a certification does not proclaim competency beyond the completion date on the card. Responsibility for on-going lifeguard competency is the full responsibility of the employer/owner/operator of a facility which accepts certifications.*

Establish a policy and procedure that makes sense for your facility's specific needs, utilizing the suggestions contained herein and periodically review and update them.