



Evaluation 2013/14

Introduction

Watch Around Water (WAW) is an industry driven program that aims to ensure the safety of young children by reducing risk at public swimming pools. It provides a consistent message to parents/guardians about effective supervision of young children at public pools; that children aged under 5 years should stay within arm's reach and those aged 5-10 remain within sight. The WAW program has been running in Victoria through a partnership between Life Saving Victoria (LSV) and Aquatics & Recreation Victoria (ARV) since 2008, and now has over 120 accredited facilities on board. The program comprises an evaluation component to provide ongoing feedback to the industry on its' progress. In 2013/14, LSV assessed 59 accredited facilities in terms of their adherence to the WAW guidelines, with the key objectives to determine how aquatic facilities are promoting WAW and identify any areas for improvement. Managers and visiting parents/guardians were also surveyed to gain their views on supervision practices in public pools.

Facility assessments

Compliance across all facilities was 60%, highlighting a significant need to improve promotion of the program.

Facility entrance

Facilities promoted WAW well at pool entrances, with most entrances displaying clearly defined ages of supervision (97%), supervision requirements in entry terms and conditions (95%), and WAW materials (75%).

Significant improvement is required in the provision of wristbands to children with just 47% of facilities supplying them to children in either age group. In addition, reception staff should be further encouraged to explain WAW to patrons.

Systems and Processes

Internal policy documents covered WAW effectively, with 80% of facilities documenting the ages of supervision and 75% formally covering the policy in the induction process for new staff. This should be a

priority at every facility to ensure all staff understand the program. Formal records of WAW being covered at in-service staff training requires attention, having occurred at just 60% of facilities. Two-thirds (63%) of facilities did not have a copy of the Professional Development Booklet, which would greatly assist them to run the WAW program.

Pool area

Pool areas are the most dangerous places in aquatic facilities for young children and management of these in terms of supervision requires significant improvement. WAW materials were on display in 68% of pool areas and wristbands were worn by just 39% of all children aged under 10, highlighting an urgent need to review whether wristbands are the best option for each age group. Just 28% of facilities had supervision signage in place in both male and female change rooms, which is an ideal place to remind parents/ carers to be vigilant. Most (80%) on-duty lifeguards reported undertaking WAW training in the past 12 months; however 43% were observed failing to address non-compliant parents/carers and just 50% carried lifeguard cards on them.

Manager survey

Overall, 88% of managers believed the introduction of WAW had made parents/guardians more aware of the need to actively supervise their children. This is an increase of 6% compared to the 2012/13 survey. Most managers (71%) rated patron supervision as either 'very good' or 'good', a 7% decline on the 2012/13 survey.

The biggest barriers preventing staff from effectively running the WAW program were: approaching non-compliant patrons (63%), language barriers (42%) and program cost (25%).

They rated the most effective means of encouraging patrons to engage in active supervision as:

- Talking to patrons (71%),
- Lifeguard cards (46%), and
- Wristbands (46%).

Just 47% of facilities provided wristbands to children aged under 10. The main reasons they did not provide them were: the cost, the mess they create, and children/parents/guardians removing them anyway.

Patron knowledge of WAW

In addition, 14 parents from several facilities completed a questionnaire on the WAW program, with concerning results despite a small sample size. Just under half (43%, similar to 2012/13) of patrons reported they were unaware of the WAW program, and 69% reported that facility staff had not spoken to them about the importance of supervision. This is however, an improvement of 7% on 2012/13 data.

Parents self-rated their level of supervision higher than managers, estimating it to be very good (64%) or excellent (36%).

Brochures were the most common element of WAW that patrons noticed (67%), followed by pull-up banners and wristbands (33%).

Overall, parents rated the program as moderately successful (75%) in encouraging them to safely and responsibly supervise their children when visiting an aquatic facility.

Summary

In summary, the evaluation identified a need for facilities to expand their delivery of the WAW program in order to educate parents/carers on the importance of supervision of young children around water and ensure their safety in and around aquatic environments. Particular focus is required on:

- providing verbal instruction to parents/carers on WAW and addressing non-compliance,
- keeping training records updated,
- placing supervision signage in pool areas, and
- reviewing whether wristbands are the most appropriate tool for monitoring children who require active supervision.

For more information contact

Ms Rhiannon Birch
Senior Research Assistant
Aquatic Risk & Research Department
Life Saving Victoria
Phone: (03) 9676 6576
Email: rhiannon.birch@lifesavingvictoria.com.au



YOUR CHILD YOUR FOCUS
PARENTS SUPERVISE – LIFEGUARDS SAVE LIVES.

