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## POLICY ON WATER SAFETY

### 1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This document is a policy of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) and relates to water safety and prevention of deaths due to drowning in Australia and New Zealand. There are over 400 deaths per year in Australasia from drowning, and this is the leading cause of death in children under the age of 5 years. Over half of these child deaths occur in domestic swimming pools.

### 2. POLICY

ACEM has an education and advocacy role in the prevention of death and injury from drowning.

ACEM believes there should be national uniformity for measures effective in reducing death from drowning include fencing of swimming pools, adequate supervision and education, and access to early and effective resuscitation and emergency care.

ACEM believes there should be uniformity in national legislation concerning the use of approved personal flotation devices that should be worn whenever riding in a boat or other water-craft.

ACEM supports reporting of circumstances of immersion events to injury surveillance organisations (e.g. national coronial database) as an important step in developing future preventative strategies.

### 3. PROCEDURE AND ACTIONS

Swimming pools and outdoor spas must have safety fencing that isolates the pool and complies with Australian Standard AS1926 or New Zealand's Fencing of Swimming Pools Act 1987. Fencing and gates should also be maintained and owners comply with legislation concerning pool safety inspections.

Children must be directly supervised in and around pools, baths, beaches, rivers, lakes, dams, creeks, or any other potential drowning risk environment and should never be left alone.

Inflatable pools and buckets should always be emptied after use and stored away from children.

Other potential household water-hazards should be removed or have access restricted.

Access to dams, creeks and rivers and other water hazards on rural properties should be restricted, e.g. by child-resistant fencing around the home, water tanks etc. The concept of "Safe Play Areas" for rural properties is supported.

Swimming while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is strongly discouraged; operation of boats or water-craft while under the influence of alcohol or drugs should be prohibited in all jurisdictions.

Persons with conditions likely to cause sudden loss of consciousness should seek further advice regarding swimming from their supervising medical officer.

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The community should be made more aware of the dangers of entering flooded waters or crossings, on foot or by vehicle, during floods. Swimming lessons and water safety programs should be targeted towards high risk groups. This should include not only children but also be tailored for immigrants and tourists.

Those swimming at surf beaches should ensure they swim in patrolled area ("between the flags") where possible.

Water based recreational activities (e.g. water skiing, rock fishing, rapids) should ensure use of appropriate safety measures. This includes training, flotation devices, helmets and lifeguards as appropriate.

Weather conditions should be monitored during water based competitions to ensure the safety of competitors, with agreed criteria for interventions such as delays or cancellation.

#### **4. DATES AND NOTES**

*Approved by Council:* December 2006

*Last reviewed and approved:* July 2012

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