

“Responsible Adult” at a Semi-Public Pool

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance regarding the definition of a “Responsible Adult” as it pertains to the signage requirement for semi-public pools that have less than 2,000 square feet of water surface area and that do not provide lifeguards.

Discussion

Indiana’s code for warning signs at pools, 410 IAC 6-2.1-36 (a)(2), states:

Whenever the pool area is open for use and no lifeguard service is provided, warning signs shall be placed in plain view at the entrances and inside the pool area that state "Warning–No Lifeguard on Duty". In addition, the signs shall also state in clearly legible letters at least two (2) inches high, "No Swimming Alone. Children Under 14 Years of Age and Nonswimmers Shall Not Use the Pool Unless Accompanied by a Responsible Adult.

These signs are required at semi-public pools that do not provide lifeguards and have less than 2,000 square feet of water surface area. Public pools and semi-public pools with over 2,000 square feet of water surface area must have the appropriate number of lifeguards.

The purpose of Section 36 is *to require the signs*, however, the enforcement of the behavior that the signs address is the responsibility of the facility.

According to the Centers for Disease Control*:

- In 2005, there were 3,582 fatal unintentional drownings in the United States, averaging ten deaths per day. An additional 710 people died, from drowning and other causes, in boating-related incidents.
- More than one in four fatal drowning victims are children 14 and younger. For every child who dies from drowning, another four received emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries.
- Nonfatal drownings can cause brain damage that may result in long-term disabilities including memory problems, learning disabilities, and permanent loss of basic functioning (i.e., permanent vegetative state).

Guidance

ISDH staff recommends that this “responsible adult”:

- Be at least 16 years of age.
- Be able to swim.
- Maintain close supervision.
- Should not be involved in any other distracting activity (such as reading, playing cards, talking on the phone) while supervising children.
- Make sure that weak or non-swimmers are restricted to either the teaching pool or the designated shallow end of the main pool.
- Not allow the use of air-filled or foam toys, such as “water wings”, “noodles”, or inner-tubes, in place of proper life jackets (personal flotation devices). These toys are not designed to keep swimmers safe.
- One responsible adult can be responsible for a maximum of two children aged 14 and under, unless the children are able to swim.

Finally, it is the responsibility of the semi public facility to, by policy, define whom they will accept as a “responsible adult” for a child under the age of 14 or a nonswimmer and to enforce their policy.

* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Water-Related Injuries: Fact Sheet

(5-14-10)