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- » Understanding the importance of lifeguarding
- » Discovering the basics about water rescue and safety
- » Following a day in the life of a lifeguard

Chapter 1

Lifeguarding 101

Welcome to the world of lifeguarding, “the best job you will ever have.” While we admit that is a pretty bold statement to start off with, ask anyone you know who has spent any amount of time lifeguarding and see what they have to say. This lifeguard world is filled with culture and tradition that goes back decades, and we are very excited to share it all with you in this book.

While stereotypically you might think of lifeguarding as a teenager’s job, across the United States and around the world, there are dedicated people (including some who have given their lives to save others) who are proud to call themselves professional lifeguards. Think of Aquaman . . . but a realistic day-to-day version! We cordially invite you to kick off your shoes, grab your most appropriate bathing suit, and dive right in!

The Importance of Lifeguarding

Drowning is one of the leading causes of death across the United States and around the world. It is considered one of the most avoidable ways to die. How is it avoidable, you might ask? By simply swimming and recreating in waters protected by lifeguards, swimmers greatly reduce their risk. The majority of drownings are avoidable, but human nature just can’t resist the temptation

of getting wet. Did you know that 74 percent of fatal pool drownings happen residentially? When no lifeguards are present, public pools and beaches post signs that read “Swim at your own risk,” yet people ignore the posted warnings and tragedies happen. Everyone thinks bad things can’t happen to them. If that were the case, then bad things wouldn’t happen to anyone. Frankly, this attitude can get you in a lot of trouble!



REMEMBER

At the end of the day, if there are no lifeguards on duty, you really shouldn’t be swimming . . . and yes that goes for people who are good swimmers too!

The Perks of Lifeguarding

Although there are waaaaay too many perks of the job to list in one chapter, we figured we would share some of our favorites!

- » **The beach, pool, or park is your office.** When you are told to report to work, this is where you are going! This couldn’t be any more atypical. Your views of the sunset (if you’re not working indoors) will be way better than your friends’ who work typical 9-5 jobs at their desks, guaranteed!
- » **You have the best seat in the house.** People actually pay to come to your job, but you get paid *and* get the best seat in the house! Everyone wants to sit up on the lifeguard stand, chair, or tower . . . but they don’t get to visit the Royal Palace and sit on the throne! Being high above the ground looking down on all brings both pride and power.
- » **No shoes, no shirt . . . no problem!** Try showing up to a traditional office and stripping down to a speedo or your favorite bathing suit. You’ll never have a problem deciding what to wear either, since as a lifeguard you need to be in uniform at all times (no heels, no laces, no ties, no briefcases, no belts . . . no problem!).
- » **Being outdoors (unless you’re indoors!)** While there most certainly are indoor lifeguarding jobs, we think that one of the best perks is getting to work outside. The warm blanket of sun covering you from head to toe, the gentle breeze that slightly blows your hair, the sweet scent of sunscreen infiltrating your nose, ending with a gorgeous sunset. And yes . . . you get paid for all of that!

- » **When the ocean is closed to the public for big surf, it is open to you.** This is a great opportunity for you and the lifeguard team to train. While we recognize the hazards of getting in the water during a high surf advisory, this is how ocean lifeguards fully prepare for the worst! Each agency has its own rules and regulations when it comes to putting guards in the water on these hazardous training days.
- » **Use of all the fancy equipment.** All the toys! Each specialized piece of equipment has a purpose and the only way to get proficient with them is to take them out. Grab a kayak, surfski, or rescue board! Get trained to row or operate the jet ski or motorized lifeguard boat!
- » **You get paid to work out!** Staying in shape is an important part of this job, as we will discuss in Part 3, but not many jobs pay you to work out. Yes, you read that correctly. Go to the gym on your own time or work out on the clock! In many cases, lifeguard shacks and areas have a variety of workout equipment to help you maintain your lifeguard physique.
- » **You develop lasting friendships.** It is not uncommon to make lifelong friends on the job. Due to the close-knit nature of the work, coupled with trainings and teamwork, you will quickly find yourself developing friendships with fellow lifeguards that can last a lifetime. These may be the people in your wedding party and at your children's first birthdays. Crazy as it sounds, you might even meet your future partner on the job (trust us, it has happened on more than one occasion)! P.S. Lifeguard weddings get wild!

Developing skills that will benefit you beyond the water

Being a lifeguard, you get much more than just a lifesaving skill set. There are many, many benefits that you develop from working as a lifeguard that transition into other jobs and industries.

Increased self confidence

Self-confidence and self-esteem take time to build up, especially for teenagers. Some of us never get our self-confidence up to a level we are happy with, even into our adult lives. Lifeguarding is an extremely serious job that requires making life and death decisions. At the end of the day, knowing that the decisions and

actions you made helped keep people safe will absolutely lead to a boost in your own self-confidence!

Communication skills

Working in this role requires you to speak to all kinds of people, including your fellow coworkers, and adult and juvenile patrons visiting your facility. You need to be able to clearly express your thoughts and communicate with the public. Sometimes people just want to walk up to your lifeguard stand or chair to chat or ask a question. But in more serious situations, being able to delegate tasks with clarity and efficiency goes a long way when the clock is ticking.

Leadership qualities

Leaders are made, not born! Let's face it . . . some of us are better at leading than others. That doesn't mean that you can't learn to be a good leader. Leadership qualities take time to develop. As a lifeguard, there is no doubt you will find yourself in situations where you need to use these skills! Lifeguards who possess this skill set may find themselves being offered leadership positions or administrative titles, such as aquatics director, coordinator, captain, lieutenant, boatswain, and so on. These positions not only earn you more responsibility but also more money.



TIP

You do not need to be in an administrative or leadership position to be a leader. Some of the best lifeguards we know display incredible leadership skills. They are not bosses or administrators . . . just plain old salty lifeguards. Be the best version of yourself, and, in time, your leadership qualities will grow.

Teamwork

In almost all circumstances in this job, you need the rest of your crew to help you out. Whether you find yourself in a multi-person rescue or simply need backup to cover your chair when you jump in, you must be able to rely on your coworkers. You also need to be reliable in any situation that arises. Lifeguards often work closely together with the common goal of executing a rescue and saving someone's life. Without the ability to work as a team, the likelihood of a successful outcome significantly decreases.



REMEMBER

Teamwork makes the dream work!

Problem-solving skills

Some lifeguards might say that no two rescues are the same. Many certainly are similar, but when it comes down to it, you were tasked with a situation at hand and it was ultimately you who had to make the decision. This builds off the point about self-confidence. As you become more comfortable making autonomous decisions for the safety of others, you will realize that all this time you were dissecting the problem and coming up with the most efficient and sensible way to bring a swimmer or patron out of danger.

Handling stress

Stress is part of everyday life. However, as a first responder, levels of stress can be elevated, based on what you saw or actions you took while administering medical aid or performing a water rescue. Professional lifeguards learn that it is healthy and okay to feel stressed. You will learn not to compartmentalize your feelings and learn that there are ways you can express how you feel without being afraid of looking weak. Learning how to handle and recognize post-traumatic stress disorder will help you tremendously — not just as a lifeguard, but in everyday life as well. *Critical incident stress debriefings* (CISDs) are common practices after a serious rescue, especially when there is loss of life.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

A *critical incident stress debriefing*, or *CISD*, is a process that occurs soon after a traumatic incident, typically 24 to 72 hours after the event. It is led by a designated facilitator and designed to support recovery to those exposed to high levels of stress or trauma. It may link employees to counseling and treatment services if needed.



REMEMBER

You should never feel ashamed to talk about your stress or anxiety. In most jobs, services exist should you need or want to talk to a professional.

Meeting all types of people

We touch on this in far more depth in Chapter 7, but you will meet people from all walks of life in this career, providing a massive network arguably more diverse than any other profession.

While lifeguarding is typically thought of as a young person's job, the reality is that you can't have 20, 30, or even 40 years of experience and still be a teenager! One of the unique parts of this

job is the age difference between the younger and older guards. Unlike a traditional “office,” where friendships are formed in a more structured setting, it is not uncommon for professional yet more casual friendships to form between guards of different ages. It’s not rare to get dinner after work with a table of lifeguards in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s.

Most people’s closest friends are within a few years of their age. As a lifeguard, true friendships are formed despite differences in age, based on their shared commonalities and love for lifesaving!

The love of the water and saving lives attracts people from all walks of life. Some choose this as a full-time job and others as part-time work. In later chapters, we go into more detail about the varying options you have as a lifeguard. Regardless, you could be working with people from different careers and backgrounds. One second you could be listening to someone’s experiences working on Wall Street, and the next moment you could be talking to someone working in public safety, medicine, or education, to name just a few. They each have their own story and journey to share with you, as long as you are willing to listen. The common denominator that brings all lifeguards back to the lifeguard chair is their passion for water safety.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle

Generally speaking, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is something that goes hand in hand with being a lifeguard. Since this job is extremely physical at times and requires a certain level of fitness, it is not uncommon for people who care about their health and fitness to be drawn to it. There are many ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle and we hope you follow some of our suggestions in the following sections.

Practice healthy eating habits

You are what you eat! What you put into your body not only affects how you look, but also how you feel. You don’t necessarily have to feel 100 percent all the time, but you should always be ready to exert a lot of energy at any given moment. Emergencies can go down in the blink of an eye. Eating healthy means maintaining a balanced diet that is comprised of all the major food groups and nutrients.

Get in your cardio and don't forget to lift!

The job calls for you to be physically fit, and what better way to maintain fitness than intense cardio and lifting? The daily duties of the job help you maintain physical fitness without even realizing it. Swimming and running on rescues, treading water, and pulling victims to safety are all workouts in and of themselves. Call this a perk of lifeguarding; as mentioned earlier, you are getting paid to work out!

Get an appropriate amount of sleep

Most people have a hard time in this category, but getting the right amount of sleep each night can make or break you . . . especially as a lifeguard. Your work requires you to focus and concentrate. It's not a good idea to be tired, sluggish, or sleepy while on the job. On average, you should be getting a minimum of eight hours of sleep a night. So many great things happen while you are sleeping, so you are cutting yourself short if you aren't getting enough. If you want to feel your best and function at peak performance, consider setting yourself a bedtime and sticking to it. We promise you won't regret it.

Take care of yourself and your body

As a lifeguard, the first step in any situation is to make sure that the scene is safe. You are in no state to help others if you are not in the proper shape. Be sure to take care of yourself to avoid injury and illness. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and rest or take the day off. The job relies on you being healthy in order to make the facility safe for everyone else — and that means attending to your physical, mental, and emotional health.

Being a lifeguard fosters the perfect environment for your mental health. You are surrounded by a fun group of coworkers in a fast-paced, exciting environment. There will be times when the job gets stressful, of course, but if you do not allow negative feelings to overtake you, you will become stronger and more prepared for all types of situations.



REMEMBER

Don't be afraid to put yourself first! As the 1940's fitness pioneer Dan Lurie always said, "Health is your greatest wealth!"

The Tough Side of Being a Lifeguard

While lifeguarding most certainly has its perks, don't be fooled . . . the job can and will be difficult at times. We don't often talk about the tough side of being a lifeguard, but the reality is, it does exist. Dealing with the public does present its challenges. In the following sections, we address some of the more common difficulties about the job and offer our best advice on how to handle them.

Being the bad cop

While lifeguards are known for their ability to make rescues, they spend the majority of their days trying to prevent them! They do that by enforcing a list of predetermined rules, which are set up by the facility. All of the rules are in place for safety reasons, but some seem more apparent than others. Being the bad cop isn't always easy, but it comes with the job and you must own it!

Some of the most common "bad cop" rules you will have to enforce include:

- » NO running
- » NO lifejackets or flotation devices in the water
- » NO glass bottles on the pool deck
- » NO ball playing in the water
- » NO roughhousing (chicken fights, dunking, and so on)
- » NO loud music (or music at all)
- » NO diving
- » NO sitting directly in front of the lifeguard stand or tower
- » NO swimming in unprotected waters
- » NO surfing
- » NO fishing
- » NO swimming while fully clothed

While these are just some of the more common rules you will most likely need to enforce, it is important to think about how you will deliver the message. Just because you need to be the "bad cop" doesn't mean you need to be nasty. You know the old saying,

“You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.” That applies here. The rules should be posted somewhere obvious in the facility too, as shown in Figure 1-1.



Jazmine / Adobe Stock

FIGURE 1-1: A sign at the edge of a resort pool designates the swimming rules.

You should act professional at all times. There are very few reasons to yell at anyone. In a stern, loud, and commanding voice, you should enforce the rule and explain why. It’s better to kindly but firmly explain the situation, including why they can’t continue doing whatever they are doing, and describe the implications of their actions. This is better than just barking orders. Taking that extra moment to explain goes a long way.



TIP

If a patron is giving you a hard time, simply remind them that you are doing your job, which is to keep all the swimmers safe. Starting a sentence with, “For your safety . . .” goes a long way. When in doubt, follow your facility’s emergency action plan, which in most cases involves contacting a supervising lifeguard. For more serious circumstances, be sure you know who the next party is in the chain of command. Oftentimes, it is law enforcement.



WARNING

There is never a reason to get confrontational! Keep your cool at all times, because you never know what type of person you are dealing with or what they are capable of. We speak from personal experiences!

It's not always waves, saves, and babes

When you think of lifeguarding in general, you probably can't help but think of the most picturesque, beautiful summer day. However, the harsh reality of the job includes nasty weather conditions, which lifeguards deal with on a daily basis.

Harsh work environments (hot and cold)

Lifeguards work on hot days, cold days, rainy days, stormy days, and everything in between! Each facility has its own set of guidelines for how lifeguards should perform their duties in harsh weather environments. During the hottest heat waves and the coolest cold fronts, lifeguards need to be fully prepared to spend the entire day outside. This means having the appropriate clothing and gear. Any given day's weather can quickly turn on a dime. It can be 95 degrees and sunny all afternoon and then pouring rain and cold with heavy winds an hour later. Umbrella forts, as shown in Figure 1-2, can provide the protection you need.



Cary Epstein (Author)

FIGURE 1-2: Lifeguards on the East Coast take shelter beneath a strategically placed array of umbrellas, otherwise known as an umbrella fort.



REMEMBER

Pack your bag appropriately! This means you should have clothing and gear for all weather types. Don't just rely on the forecast, as conditions can change and develop quickly.

You might assume that lifeguards don't sit in the rain. Well, that may be the case in some places, but not everywhere! We can tell you from personal experience that we have most definitely sat on the lifeguard stand during the coldest, most rain-driven days with only a few umbrellas tied up with rope to protect us. As long as it is not lightning, we sit on the stand (and get soaked if necessary) in torrential downpours. While you might think this is terrible (and to a certain extent it is), it is way better than the alternative of getting sent home with no pay.

Lifeguards who have towers (as opposed to stands) can protect themselves from the harsh environments, like wind and rain, by going inside and watching the water.

When thunder roars, stay indoors!

One of the harshest environments you may experience are thunderstorms. While they are fascinating to watch and at times even fun to be caught in, they can be very dangerous and you should take them seriously.

As a lifeguard, it is part of your job to monitor the weather and know when thunderstorms are forthcoming. It is also your responsibility to safely and efficiently remove swimmers from the water, close down your operation, and seek shelter. Swimmers put themselves at serious risk if they wait until the last minute to pack up and get moving. Swimmers need to do better at listening to the instructions of lifeguards when they are telling them it is time to get going.



WARNING

Getting struck by lightning is not as uncommon as you might think. In recent years, lifeguards have been killed on the job during lightning storms. Is it worth your life?



TECHNICAL
STUFF

According to the National Weather Service, lightning strikes the United States about 25 million times a year (for more, see weather.gov). Although most lightning occurs in the summer, people can be struck at any time of year. Lightning kills about 20 people in the United States each year, and hundreds more are severely injured.

Facility maintenance

As nice as it is to feel that the facility is yours, since you and the other lifeguards are the ones running the show, with that comes other responsibilities. Just like with your own home, you have to take care of it and maintain it. That means cleaning up your life-guard area and, if it falls on your list of responsibilities, the bathrooms. You might be in charge of hosing down the locker rooms or disinfecting parts of the facility related to the pool area.

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many recreational facilities remained open and required extra care for keeping them clean. At the end of the day, many changing areas resembled pigsties. The responsibility for cleaning them often fell on the lifeguards. Piles of hair, empty bottles of shampoo, and used toiletries might litter the floor awaiting your clean up and removal. Lifeguards at pools and waterparks may be called upon to test pool chemicals and balance the chlorine or pH levels all throughout the workday to ensure a safe environment for swimming.

These types of maintenance might not be glamorous, but they are certainly responsibilities you could be tasked with.

Decision making (am I making the right decision?)

This job has a lot of autonomy. That's mostly good, but sometimes making so many decisions can take its toll. You will always have hard decisions to make, starting with whether you should or shouldn't go in for the rescue.



TIP

You should always go in for the rescue. “When in doubt, go out!” All lifeguards know the feeling of teetering on the edge of their seats and not knowing whether someone needs help, is just fooling around, or is just chilling. It's worth saying again: You should always go in for the rescue.

On another front, you might sometimes struggle when dealing with coworkers. How do you respectfully express a different opinion than your colleague? Than your superior? These internal battles are commonplace in all careers, and lifeguarding has no shortage of these situations.

Making mistakes and learning from them

You'll mess up, you'll slip, you'll make mistakes. Just like any other job! And just like any other job, there will be consequences.

Sometimes the consequences are small. You show up late to work, maybe you'll get a slap on the wrist and docked a few minutes.

But other times, your mistakes could put someone's life in danger or, even worse, lead to their death. For example, you miss a rescue or are delayed in getting off the stand. Thankfully, lifeguarding has a built-in system where fellow lifeguards watch over each other's waters and share responsibilities. You might be told or directed to make a rescue that you otherwise might have waited on. Senior guards, officers, and supervisors play a big role in helping you learn from your mistakes and good ones will ultimately make you a better lifeguard. The common goal of safety should always be top of mind.

Illness/injury

People get hurt on this job. There is no hiding that. Think about it: At any given moment you will go from sitting on the stand to engaging every muscle in your body from the second you stand up, jump off your perch, run into the water, and swim to your victim. If you aren't properly stretched and ready to go, you could injure yourself. We have seen it time and time again — lifeguards pulling a muscle and ending their season. During morning workouts or mid-rescue, you must be careful when employing full exertion of your body.

Stress

Lifeguarding comes with a good amount of stress. Whether it is directly related to a rescue or not, there are many types of scenarios that you will be involved in that will activate your general adaptation syndrome for responding to stress. It may be something as simple as dealing with an unruly patron who is giving you a hard time, or something more serious and life threatening. Either way, as a lifeguard you will learn how to best deal with stress. This can most certainly help you outside of the job in your everyday life.

Death

Although this is something we hope you never have to deal with on the job, we would be lying if we said that it doesn't happen. It is most definitely a possibility; you may encounter death if you work as a lifeguard long enough. Our job is saving lives and the thought of losing someone is the worst possible thing that can happen. A harsh reality of the job is that no matter how good you

are, it can still happen despite your best efforts. The most important thing to remember — just because someone dies, doesn't mean you did something wrong. As long as you did everything you were taught and trained to do, you can at least rest knowing you did your best.

Every facility has its own way of dealing with an on-duty death, and you should use your facility's employee assistance program or whatever they have in place to seek out professionals such as counseling and support services. You should never feel ashamed to talk about something that might be bothering you, especially after losing someone. Deaths in aquatic facilities don't have to occur just from drownings or water-related incidents. Sudden cardiac arrest can happen anywhere, at any time, and that includes your pool deck, waterpark, or beach front.



WARNING

Regardless of the cause, premature death is shocking and difficult for all of us to deal with. Add to that any feelings of responsibility you feel as a lifeguard, and that's a heavy burden to carry. Don't carry it alone. Go talk to someone about your grief. Your feelings are valid and normal. Not dealing with them can lead to depression and even thoughts of suicide.

While others run out, lifeguards dive in

If most people were asked to come up with a list of public service/first responder heroes, they most likely would say firefighter, police officer, or EMT. When people think of these amazing heroic professionals, they can't help but think of:

- » Firefighters, coming out of a burning building carrying a lifeless child in their arms.
- » Police officers, responding to a 911 call for help.
- » EMTs and paramedics, pulling up lights and sirens in the ambulance, ready to care for the sick, dying, and injured.

But people don't often think of *lifeguards*, who are the first ones to risk their lives diving into dangerous waters to assist a swimmer in distress.

When the building is on fire and everyone is running out, firefighters run in. When a mass shooting happens or a terrorist attacks and the public runs away, the police run toward them.

When the world was in complete shutdown, EMS providers showed up for work to provide the most important job in the middle of a healthcare crisis, barely ever going home and putting their own lives at risk.

Yes, these people serve heroic duties. But lifeguards never seem to get the same notoriety as their fellow first responders. Maybe it's because their services are not equally used or provided in every part of the country, or simply it is just being overlooked.

You don't dial 911 to get a lifeguard to respond. The lifeguard is just there, sees the problem, and responds. A true *first* responder. With fire and police responses, the media has a chance to arrive on the scene and cover the event. Unless there's a news crew at your facility, media coverage of lifesaving efforts go unreported to the public.

When the surf is pounding and the waves are crashing well overhead, who are you going to call? The lifeguards who respond to these calls for help will do whatever it takes to get that victim back to shore, safe and sound. Whether that be diving through the surf, jumping off a boat, or launching the jet ski . . . these professionals risk their lives to save others.

While it doesn't happen often, lifeguards do occasionally lose their lives on the job. May we never forget them, their actions, and all they sacrificed to save another human life.



TIP

Next time you find yourself at your local pool, beach, or lake, perhaps take a second to thank the lifeguards for their service!

Considering What It Takes to Be a Lifeguard

So, you've picked up this book and are probably wondering what are the next steps to kickstarting your career. Whether you are in search of a full-time career, something to do for extra cash, or a job to keep you occupied during the summer, we hope we can help you navigate this path.

Getting into and staying in shape

It likely comes as no surprise that performing the duties of this job is physically demanding and is not a good fit for everyone. We go in far more depth about this in the coming chapters, but it is important that you recognize the importance of being physically fit in order to perform this job well. The qualifying procedures prior to starting a lifeguarding career test your ability to run, swim, and ultimately bring a struggling victim back to safety.



REMEMBER

Note that being in physical shape does not end after you land the lifeguard job. It is important that you maintain a high level of fitness throughout your lifesaving career, in order to properly perform the daily duties of a lifeguard.

Training and classroom work

Just like with any other job, you need to undergo training to learn the ins and outs of lifeguarding. There are many technical things to learn and a required number of hours in the classroom. You have to become certified as a professional rescuer in first aid, CPR, and AED. You'll develop an extensive lifeguarding skill set, learning how to make rescues in all different scenarios and situations. The lifeguarding career and what you learn varies depending on which route you take: pool, waterpark, open water, or ocean. However, the fundamentals are the same. Whichever destination you choose and wherever you go, you'll learn in far more depth the specifics of the job and the role you play.

It all begins in the classroom, transitioning into hands-on skills in the water with your classmates and instructors. This will fully prepare you to be a functioning lifeguard, ready to save lives on the job.

Taking the required certification exams

In order to be a certified lifeguard, you must pass a series of physical and written exams. While we would love to share with you the specifics of exactly what you need, this is complicated because it depends on where you work. In fact, the type of environment you guard and the state or area you live in together play a role in the lifeguard requirements.

What we can definitively say is that all lifeguard tests require some sort of physical activity that includes swimming and

performing rescues. When you are trying out for open water positions, there will most likely be a run portion as well. Also expect a written exam in some capacity. Just as an example, if your facility requires an American Red Cross Lifeguard Certification, you will be required to get an 80 percent or higher on the American Red Cross Lifeguard Training final examination. No matter how you slice it, your knowledge and skills will be tested and you should be ready to give it your all!



TIP

Inquire about the lifeguard qualifications at your local pool, beach, or waterpark ahead of time. Know what is expected so you can prepare yourself to be successful! Every lifeguarding park and facility has different expectations.

Considering Where Lifeguards Put Their Skills to Use

You might be wondering what your options are for working as a lifeguard. The truth is that we can say with confidence that there is no shortage of opportunities. Employers everywhere are looking for certified lifeguards to staff their facilities. Wherever there is water designated for swimming, a lifeguard is needed!

At pools and waterparks

Few things are more nostalgic than the memories of going to your neighborhood pool or waterpark with your friends and family to cool off during a hot and sweaty day. I think everyone at one point wanted to be the lifeguard sitting atop the chair, with a bird's eye view of the entire pool. Get certified and you can now have this opportunity!

You might be surprised by the number of pools in your area, all of which need lifeguards to function. Here are different settings for lifeguards:

- » Neighborhood pools
- » Aquatic centers
- » Gyms
- » Apartment complexes

- » Hotels and resorts
- » College and high school campuses
- » Country clubs
- » Camps

In big and small bodies of water

Visiting the beach is often a childhood favorite for many. Watching the lifeguards up on the stand and in the water, we thought they always seemed so cool. Little did we know that with a bit of determination and talent, we could be just like them . . . all we had to do was take the test! There are lifeguard jobs available at all open bodies of water, big and small — from the sleepaway camp lake, to the ocean beach, to the bayside park. Get certified, take the tests, and you can have this opportunity!



TIP

Qualifying procedures for open bodies of water typically occur a number of times during the year (or sometimes only once at the start of the season). You can't just jump on board at any time, like you might be able to as a pool lifeguard. Find out when your beach is hiring, make sure your certification is valid, and mark it on your calendar!

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A JONES BEACH LIFEGUARD

We recognize that every lifeguard job is different, so it is impossible to describe a generic day in the life of a typical lifeguard. We can, however, share a day in the life of a Jones Beach lifeguard, which is located on Long Island, New York, where we work. There will certainly be some parallels with other lifeguarding agencies, but I think you'll find that the differences outnumber the similarities. We live and die by *The JBLC Golden Rule of Hour UP/Hour DOWN*, as described here:

Shift Time: **0930-1730**

0925: Sign in at designated location and report to your designated lifeguard area.

0930-0955: This is your own time to get ready for the day. Stow your personal belongings in the locker room. Put on your uniform. Apply

your sunscreen. Throw your lunch in the fridge. Refill your water bottle and get mentally prepared for the day!

0955-1000: Report to the main lifeguard stand (the *mainstand*) for your assignment and first sit. They tell you what stand you are sitting on or opening for the day.

1000-1100 1 Hour UP: You lifeguard for one hour in the stand (in most cases, you will be sitting with another lifeguard), scanning the water, taking preventative actions, and if necessary, performing water rescues.

1100-1200 1 Hour DOWN: The most important thing to know about this is that your hour down is not a break . . . it's an hour off the stand. You are expected to respond to any and all emergencies. In most cases, this means backing up the primary guards on the opposite hour who are currently in the stands. On your hour down, you may choose to go for a swim, run, or work out in any capacity. This is also a great time to get hands-on and practice with different types of lifeguard-related equipment. Drills and in-service trainings often occur on your hours down. Regardless of what you choose to do, and especially if you opt to leave the lifeguard area, you must receive permission from your field's lifeguard officer on duty. As long as you are poised to respond to emergencies, you may sit behind the mainstand and read a book, relax, and take in some shade. This is your time to recharge and relax, as you will be going back up to lifeguard stand at the top of the hour.

1200-1300: 1 Hour UP

1300-1400: 1 Hour DOWN

1400-1500: 1 Hour UP

1500-1600: 1 Hour DOWN

1600-1700: 1 Hour UP

1700-1730: This is your own time at the end of the day to get your belongings together and unwind before signing out. Head on back to the designated lifeguard area, grab an outdoor shower (optional), get a snack from the fridge, and call it a day!

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Cary Epstein (Author)

A lifeguard on a crowded afternoon at Jones Beach, NY gets on his feet for a better view of the patrons swimming.

SUMMER SCHEDULE FOR A LOS ANGELES COUNTY LIFEGUARD

By Joel Gitelson

Based on your seniority, compiled by the number of hours you have worked over the years, you can choose which section you want to work in (Southern, Central or Northern). Within that section, you choose the area where you want to work and then choose the 40-hour work week schedule for that area. This could be Hermosa in Southern, Venice or Santa Monica in Central, or Zuma and Malibu in Northern. You accrue hours during the rating period from September 1st to August 31st. Once you're put into that schedule, there's an area meeting where you get to meet your supervisors and go over the rules of the road. At the end of the meeting there might be a group buoy swim, or a pier jump, or maybe just bagels and coffee.

Generally, that's the last time you will all get together as one unit until the first weekend in August for the International Surf Festival. That's the weekend for Intracrew night competition (LA County areas only) and Taplin night competition (open to all beaches). After that, it may not be until the end of season area party in late August when you see almost everyone again in one place.

When your schedule starts, you directly go to your assigned tower, ready for a full eight hours (or more) of lifeguarding. Opening and closing the tower can be the most distracting part of the day and diligence in keeping your eyes on the water while setting up the tower and the area around it is critical. Checking in with headquarters to let someone know you are there is obviously important. Some specifics:

- You get a half hour workout during the weekdays and 20 minutes on the weekend. There is some flexibility to these times as it depends on the level of activity in your area. Sometimes it's longer; other times there's no time for a workout at all.
- At all times, you are responsible for *your* water, and you need to be aware of what is going on at the towers adjacent to you as well. Like all beaches across the country, some areas are busier than others, but the rules are the same: WATCH THE WATER/STAY IN SHAPE/DO THE RIGHT THING.
- You bring to the tower everything you need for the day. Fins, lunch, fluids, radio, binoculars, workout gear, and so on. There is no lunch break. There are no breaks. If you need to use a toilet, the permanent (guard) will come to your tower and give you the truck to take to the main station or the nearest public restrooms. As a permanent lifeguard, I can tell you that this was done infrequently. Lifeguards just adjust their habits to avoid this from happening.
- The towers have a phone or radio, high director's chair, first aid box, rescue can, and boat tow line. The boat tow line is used for exactly what its name implies. If you see a disabled boat that is slowly being pushed into the surfline, you immediately notify headquarters, who will alert your area permanent and Baywatch. You then swim out to the vessel in distress, hook the tow line to the boat and, with the help of backup, tow the boat out of danger. This is one of the most intense aspects of tower lifeguarding. Attaching the line to a boat, and the line to your rescue can, and then the rescue can strap across your torso is just plain gnarly. You must keep your wits about you so as not to get jerked by a wave as it hits the boat you are now attached to! You might be alone for a few minutes until back up arrives. The safety of the persons aboard the vessel in distress comes first. If they need to come off the boat you take care of that. Lives come first, property second, and safety for all, always.

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- When in the tower, your gaze is constant. You are responsible for the area in front of you and to the towers adjacent to you. If the can is hanging from the tower, you're in it. When you leave the tower, the can ALWAYS goes with you. When on the sand it's important to keep the can in motion so that the guards in the adjacent towers can keep track of you. You do the same when you see a tower without a rescue can hanging. If a guard in an adjacent tower goes down to the beach, you need to know where they are in case they need backup. Generally there should be some gesture with the rescue can that you see each other.
- If you get to work out, the permanent in charge of the area needs to approve it and then the towers adjacent to you need to know. Placing your can in the sand at the base of the tower is the sign that you are on a workout. If the can is resting on the railing in a horizontal position, it means you are treating someone for minor first aid. Any treatment that goes beyond what you have in your first aid box requires the permanent to respond with the rescue truck. They will handle it and you return to the tower to watch the water.
- As the day progresses, activity in some areas may decrease while in other areas it may increase.
- At the end of your shift, you call in your activity for the day. Rescues, prevents, first aids performed, boat warnings, and so on. Beaches with large parking areas will always be busier than beaches in residential areas, but people always manage to find that one parking spot after driving an hour from their inland home and show up just as you're about to close. This is why it's so important to constantly be on your toes. As you leave the tower to walk off the beach, ALWAYS look back.