

<b>TITLE: SAFETY OF GROUPS</b>	
<b>Guideline Number: GO1320</b>	<b>Issue Date: 3 / October / 2007</b>
<b>Issue Status: 1.0</b>	

**PURPOSE:**

To provide guidelines for the safety of groups using beaches.

**SCOPE:**

This Guideline applies to the following:

- All government authorities and agencies and those organisations responsible for the management and operation of coastal environments;
- Those organisations taking groups to coastal environments and waterways; and
- Those organisations experienced in public safety and responsible for the provision of public safety services.

For example:

- Coastal/marine park authorities and managers
- Lifesaving service providers
- Lifeguards and lifeguard supervisors
- Group leaders and group participants

This Guideline applies to coastal environments, including ocean coastline and saltwater waterways that open to the oceans surrounding Australia.

**GUIDELINE DESCRIPTION:**

**1.0 General risk management**

Risk management should be integral to an organisation's operation.

The aim of risk management is to minimise losses and maximise opportunities that are closely aligned to improving safety; not only from the physical risk perspective, but including all risks associated with the use or operation of a particular area and activity.

Appropriate control measures for each area should be determined by the hazard rating of the area (e.g. ABSAMP Hazard Rating) and may include local environmental conditions such as weather and water, and other local conditions such as geography and population demographics.

A risk assessment should be conducted for all areas to which the public has ready access to identify not only risks, but also current control measures and their appropriateness.

- a. All beaches at which it is known that swimming and other similar aquatic recreation occurs, and access to which is readily available, should have a risk assessment.
- b. As part of the risk assessment, an analysis should be completed on whether or not a lifesaving service should be provided.
- c. Coastal managers and group leaders should identify any foreseeable hazards, assess their risks and take action to eliminate or control them.

**2.0 General group safety**

The factors that need to be considered when planning to take a group to the beach include:

- a. Beach hazard rating of the beach;
- b. Special needs of the participants; and
- c. Likely beach conditions on the day(s) of attendance

### **3.0 Group leader – pre-planning**

#### 3.1 The group leader should:

- a. Hold the appropriate qualification (e.g. Senior First Aid). The specific type and level of the qualification may depend on whether or not specialist leaders, supervisors, or instructors have been engaged (e.g. employed lifeguards or volunteer lifeguards) to assist the group leader.
- b. Be more highly skilled and experienced than the group members being led. (e.g. Instructor).
- c. Be familiar with the beach the group will attend, and be familiar with any potential hazards.
- d. Brief the group members on the water conditions likely to be encountered prior to the trip.
- e. Ensure that the group members can swim to a level suitable for the conditions.
- f. Ensure group leader to group member ratios are appropriate, noting the competence levels of the group members.
- g. Ensure the group members are in good health, and that they have been requested to inform the group leader of any pre-existing ailments that may impact on their visit,
- h. Ensure relevant safety equipment is available for the group (e.g. personal flotation devices [PFDs], first aid kit, water, sunscreen, etc).
- i. Ensure the group members have clothing (wet suit, sun vest, and warm dry clothing) suitable for the expected and prevailing water and weather conditions.
- j. Take emergency communications equipment or know where the equipment is available at the venue.

#### 3.2 At the venue, the group leader should be constantly aware of:

- a. The weather conditions
- b. Condition of the group members (e.g. signs of tiredness, hypothermia, excessive sun exposure, difficulty with the water conditions)
- c. Keeping the environment clean and tidy
- d. Keeping group members under constant visual supervision
- e. Ensuring group members are aware of the location of rescue and first aid equipment
- f. Marking an area to ensure group members stay within a defined area

### **4.0 Instructor**

Should the group be under instruction, the instructor should:

- a. Hold the appropriate qualification (e.g. Senior First Aid, Bronze Medallion etc).
- b. Be more highly skilled and experienced than the group being led. (e.g. Instructor).
- c. Be familiar with the beach the group will attend, and be familiar with any potential hazards.
- d. Brief the group members on the water conditions at the venue.
- e. Ensure that the group members can swim to a level suitable for the conditions.
- f. Ensure instructor to group member ratios are appropriate, noting the competence levels of the group members.
- g. Ensure the group members are in good health, and that they have been requested to inform the group leader of any pre-existing ailments that may impact on their visit.
- h. Ensure relevant safety equipment is available for the group (e.g. PFDs, first aid kit, water, sunscreen, etc.)
- i. Have emergency communications equipment available or know where the equipment is available at the venue.
- j. Be able to give clear, concise instructions (a portable loud hailer may be required where wind and waves and other noises make the spoken voice difficult to hear), demonstrate skills correctly and identify and correct techniques, as required.
- k. Ensure the group members are not looking into the sun while demonstrating skills.

## 5.0 Ratios

5.1 In determining the ratio of group leaders to participants, there are many factors that should be considered, including:

- a. Beach Hazard Rating
- b. Beach conditions on the day(s) of attendance
- c. Special needs of the participants
- d. Activity

5.2 The recommended group leader and instructor to group member ratios are as follows.

### I. Dry (on land) programs

The following minimum leader/participant ratios are recommended. Note: Higher ratios may be required depending on the circumstances of individual excursions.

- a. Coastal walks
  - i. Coastal rock walks should be led by a leader experienced in coastal water and weather conditions.
  - ii. Day and half-day walks – Minimum ratio of one leader per ten participants
  - iii. Coastal bushwalking – Minimum ratio of two leaders experienced in the activity
  - iv. Overnight coastal walks – Minimum ratio of one leader per five participants

### II. In-water programs

#### a. CHILDREN

Age of child	Ratio of supervisors to children
1–3 years	1 supervisor for every 1 child
4–6 years	1 supervisor for every 4 children
7–10 years	1 supervisor for every 6 children
11–14 years	1 supervisor for every 8 children
15–18 years	1 supervisor for every 12 children

Notes:

1. These ratios are dependent on each child's swimming abilities.
2. If some children can't swim, more adults are needed to supervise the group.
3. If appropriate ratios cannot be met, the group outing should be cancelled.

#### b. ADULTS

- i. Boating
  - Minimum ratio of one leader per ten participants
  - All participants should be able to swim
  - It is recommended that the minimum swimming standard be the ability to swim 50 m wearing an approved PFD, and suitable clothing
- ii. Swimming (general)
  - Minimum of two leaders should be present at all times
  - In all swimming excursions it is strongly recommended that all participants be able to swim a minimum of 25 m.
  - There should be no more than 40 participants in the water at one time
  - Leaders have an extra duty of care for swimmers with specific medical conditions such as asthma and epilepsy

- iii. Swimming in inland coastal open water (e.g. non-surf beaches, lakes and rivers)
  - Minimum ratio of one leader per 15 participants
  - At least one leader present should have obtained, within the previous 5 years, a Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) or equivalent.
  - Two leaders should hold the RLSSA Bronze Medallion when the group size exceeds 30.
  - It is recommended that non-contact rescue aids (e.g. flotation aids, poles, ropes, etc.) be available.
- iv. Swimming at surf beaches
  - It is recommended that swimming at surf beaches be conducted at a beach patrolled by lifeguards, and in between the red and yellow flags
  - Minimum ratio of one leader per ten participants
  - At least one leader present should hold a current Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) Bronze Medallion unless there is a surf patrol on duty
  - Support leaders should be capable of assisting with rescue.
  - At least two leaders should hold a current SLSA Bronze Medallion when group size exceeds 30
  - To participate in surfing activities, participants should be able to swim 200 m in flat water
  - When at an unpatrolled beach (not recommended), rescue tubes or cans and/or rescue boards should be available at the swimming site
- v. Snorkelling
  - Minimum ratio of two leaders should be present at all times
  - Closed water or pool – minimum ratio of one leader experienced in the activity to 12 participants (not included in the leader/participant ratio)
  - Open water, calm conditions only – minimum ratio of one leader experienced in the activity to ten participants (not included in the leader/participant ratio)
- vi. Coastal adventure activities (such as rock climbing and abseiling)
  - The ratio of leaders to participants will depend on the experience of the participants and will range from 1:1 for inexperienced participants to 1:5 for semi-experienced and 1:10 for very experienced participants
  - The actual ratio will have regard for the age, fitness and experience of the participants and the location and degree of difficulty of the activity
  - For specific information, the activity group leader should consult with a relevant expert prior to departure on the activity

### III. Both in-water and dry programs

- a. The ratio of group leaders to participants will be specific to the activity, whether in water or on land.
- b. If there is no change to the leader, then the ratio for water-based activities takes precedence.

## **6.0 Child/student excursions**

### 6.1 General safety

- a. The carer in charge of the excursion shall always be present and maintain overall responsibility; and
- b. The adults must be able to see the children at all times and be able to assist children immediately if required.

### 6.2 Parental permission

- a. No child should leave the host venue without a parent's written authorisation.
- b. Information that should be included on the authorisation is:
  - the date/times;
  - the proposed destination;
  - the method of transport;
  - activities/purpose of the excursion; and
  - carer/adult to child ratios.

### 6.3 Safety of children on excursions

For any excursion, there shall be:

- a. appropriate supervision by staff at all times;
- b. one carer with a current Senior First Aid Certificate (or equivalent) with abilities in CPR (including child CPR) and the knowledge and ability to implement safety procedures;
- c. a well equipped portable first aid kit, suitable for the excursion;
- d. a list of all children and adults participating in the excursion;
- e. emergency information, e.g. contact lists, children with allergic reactions, etc;
- f. a mobile phone or means of contact with the centre or emergency services; and
- g. carer/adult to child ratios for excursions as per guidelines.

### 6.4 Use of volunteers/parents on excursions

- a. The minimum carer to child ratio should always be maintained while on an excursion.
- b. Volunteers over 18 years of age, parents, and close family relatives, e.g. grandparents, may be used to make up the additional adult to child ratio required, on the condition that:
  - i. the minimum carer to child ratio is maintained; and
  - ii. volunteers and regular visitors (other than parents and close family relatives) hold a current safety screening certificate from the relevant policing authority.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**Group** means 'a number of persons gathered together and forming a recognisable unit, or classified together because of common characteristics or community of interests'.

**Instructor** means 'a person who communicates knowledge or gives the facts of the matter'.

**Leader** means 'a person who directs, commands or guides with overall and ultimate responsibility for the group or activity'.

## **REFERENCES:**

Beach safety for groups, Parks Branch, Conservation Department, Manitoba, Canada, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/parks/recreation/beaches/beach\\_groups.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/parks/recreation/beaches/beach_groups.html)

Canoeing Down Under, [www.canoeingdownunder.com.au](http://www.canoeingdownunder.com.au)

Outdoor Council of Australia, [www.outdoorcouncil.asn.au](http://www.outdoorcouncil.asn.au)

Risk Management Plan, The Tops Conference Centre, April 2005.

Student excursion guidelines, South West TAFE, Victoria, May 2005, [www.swtafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.swtafe.vic.gov.au)

**APPENDICES:**

Nil