

<b>TITLE: REHABILITATION FROM ILLNESS OR INJURY</b>	
<b>Guideline Number: LS1468</b>	<b>Issue Date: 3 / October / 2007</b>
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**PURPOSE:**

To provide guidelines on rehabilitation of lifeguards who have been ill or injured and who may be unable to immediately resume full duties.

**SCOPE:**

This Guideline applies to the following:

- All government authorities and agencies and those organisations responsible for the management and operation of coastal environments; 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

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

**GUIDELINE DESCRIPTION:**

**1.0 General**

All lifesaving services should be committed to preventing illness and injuries by providing a healthy and safe operational environment for all. It is recognised that injury or illness may still occur, and therefore all incidents should be reviewed and steps taken to prevent recurrence.

**2.0 The objectives of a rehabilitation program**

- 2.1 All workplaces should have a rehabilitation program with clear objectives, including:
- a. to assist in an early, safe return to suitable lifesaving duties and activities following illness or injury;
  - b. to actively participate in and/or support any rehabilitation program commenced by the lifeguard;
  - c. to ensure that specialist assistance is fully utilised by providing support to the role of the treating medical practitioner;
  - d. to integrate the injured or ill person successfully back into lifesaving duties and activities at their normal/previous level; and
  - e. to provide suitable selected duties and a grading of identified tasks as recommended by the treating medical practitioner in terms of physical demands, intensity, duration and frequency where any member suffering from injury or illness is unable to return to his/her previous duties.

- 2.2 All lifesaving services should have a policy that encourages people to return to lifesaving duties and activities, as soon as practicable after illness or injury. The

provision of an effective rehabilitation program can provide support to individuals, and minimise disruption to their lifestyle.

### **3.0 Liaison**

All lifesaving services should, where possible, liaise with the individual involved, and, where appropriate, the treating medical practitioner and/or therapist and any other appropriate group(s) to establish suitable individual rehabilitation programs with short-term and long-term goals.

### **4.0 The responsibilities and rights of the injured lifeguard**

#### 4.1 Responsibilities:

- a. To participate in rehabilitation and minimise risk of further injury.
- b. To provide information relevant to the injury/illness that will assist in rehabilitation and reduce the risk of further injury in a timely and accurate fashion.
- c. To fully inform his/her treating medical practitioner of his/her participation in lifesaving duties and activities (including competition).
- d. To provide copies of any medical clearances that clearly identify a return to lifesaving duties and activities — this should clearly identify any return to competition.

#### 4.2 Rights:

- a. To receive support and confidentiality.
- b. To receive treatment of the injury.
- c. To be provided with suitable duties.
- d. To receive a fair review of decisions.

### **5.0 The role of management**

To show support and commitment to the rehabilitation policy and to assist lifeguards to reduce the risk of further injury.

### **6.0 Grievance policy**

Lifeguards who feel they have a grievance in relation to their rehabilitation program should be able to refer to a grievance policy or an organisation grievance/equity officer.

### **7.0 Suitable duties**

7.1 Selected suitable duties will be utilised where possible.

#### 7.2 These suitable duties:

- a. are not a permanent job change;
- b. are reviewed regularly by an appropriate lifesaving officer with a view to upgrading;
- c. must be meaningful;
- d. offer a graded return to normal duties;
- e. are utilised with the agreement of the treating medical practitioner; and
- f. should have adequate training provided for them to be carried out.

## **8.0 Implementation**

- 8.1 Participants need to be aware of their responsibilities under a rehabilitation program policy.
- 8.2 Once a stage is reached where no further progress is anticipated, then the rehabilitation program is at an end. A decision must then be made as to whether the person can permanently participate in other (suitable) duties taking into account his/her ability and limitations. This applies only if the treating doctor agrees that the duties are within the physical limitations that they have specified.
- 8.3 All lifesaving services should accept that their primary responsibility is to prevent injury and illness to their lifeguards.
- 8.4 Where appropriate, and where practicable, all reasonable effort should be made to have selected duties made available to lifeguards who have suffered illness or injury, unrelated to lifesaving duties.

## **9.0 Return to duties**

### 9.1 Injured through lifesaving duties

- a. Any lifeguard whose injury has been caused by a lifesaving activity or service duty should first consult with a general practitioner for advice on referral services.
- b. If a lifeguard has received treatment to a injury caused within lifesaving, and that injury affects the performance of the lifeguard to carry out normal duties, they should have a 'fit to return to duties' declaration form signed by their GP prior to recommencing duties as an active lifeguard or other strenuous lifesaving-related activities.
- c. A copy of such declaration should be provided to the lifesaving service supervisor or other appropriate officer.

### 9.2 Injuries outside lifesaving

- a. It is the responsibility of all lifeguards who are on any medical restriction that they feel may impinge on their ability to carry out their duties to advise their lifeguard supervisor or other appropriate officer.
- b. It is the responsibility of the lifesaving organisation and designated supervisor to liaise with the lifeguard regarding strategies for alternative duties if applicable.
- c. The lifesaving service provider should reserve the right to ask for a 'fit to return to duties' form to be completed by the lifeguard if they feel that the required duties may result in further injury or aggravate the injury or illness.

### 9.3 Ongoing fitness and health

- a. If a lifeguard suffers or has suffered from any disease or any physical or mental disability (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes or any permanent disability to a limb, eye, or ear) likely to affect their efficiency as a lifeguard, it may affect their personal safety and the safety of the public. In such situations, the lifeguard should consult their medical practitioner and lifesaving service provider prior to commencing any lifesaving activity.
- b. Each lifeguard should be required to declare at least annually that they are fit and must continue to be medically and physically fit and able to participate in any lifesaving activity.

- c. Lifeguards should be required to immediately notify their lifesaving service provider in writing of any change to their fitness level or ability to participate in lifesaving activities.

#### **DEFINITIONS:**

**Lifeguard** means ‘an appropriately trained and qualified individual who volunteers or is employed at bathing beaches, pools, etc. to prevent drowning, provide injury prevention and response services, and to save people from drowning’.

**Lifesaving service** means ‘an organised and structured service comprised of lifeguards and appropriate rescue and first aid equipment supported by a coordinated backup team’.

**Occupational health and safety (OHS)** means ‘the health and safety considerations of or relating to the activity or business for which one is trained’.

**Rehabilitation** means ‘the act of restoration of someone who has been ill or injured to normal activity’.

**Workplace stress** means ‘the negative impact (psychological or physiological) on individuals, caused by excessive pressures or critical incidents within the workplace/operational environment’.

#### **REFERENCES:**

Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines

- LS1460: Occupational health and safety policy
- LS1461: Lifeguard occupational health and safety
- LS1462: Zero tolerance on alcohol and drugs
- LS1463: Sun safe practices
- LS1464: Selection and use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- LS1465: Hazards and banning of smoking
- LS1466: Manual handling safety
- LS1467: Managing workplace stress

Guidelines for safe recreational water environments. Volume 1 – Coastal and fresh waters. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2003.

Lifeguard Service Operating Procedures Version 1, Surf Life Saving Queensland, February 2005.

Surf Life Saving Australia, 2003. Surf lifesaving training manual, 32nd edition. Elsevier Australia Pty Ltd.

SLSA Policy 2.4, Rehabilitation and return to duties, Surf Life Saving Australia, February 2003.

#### **APPENDICES:**

Nil