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# Under Surveillance

Your lifeguards scan, but do they see? Help develop essential skills of observation and response with these two exercises.

**M**aintaining constant, meaningful surveillance of patrons as they participate in aquatic activities is a key component of lifeguarding. We know surveillance means watching, looking, seeing and visualizing. We can quantify visual scanning and define areas to scan. But how do we aid lifeguards in developing knowledge of exactly what to look for? How do lifeguards develop the ability to scan the surface, as well as the bottom of the pool and all areas in between at the same time? What exactly are they to be looking for?

Sitting in the lifeguard chair is easy. Visual scanning also is not difficult. It is the training of lifeguards to make that mental connection between what they see and what is important in assessment of participant activities that's tougher. That

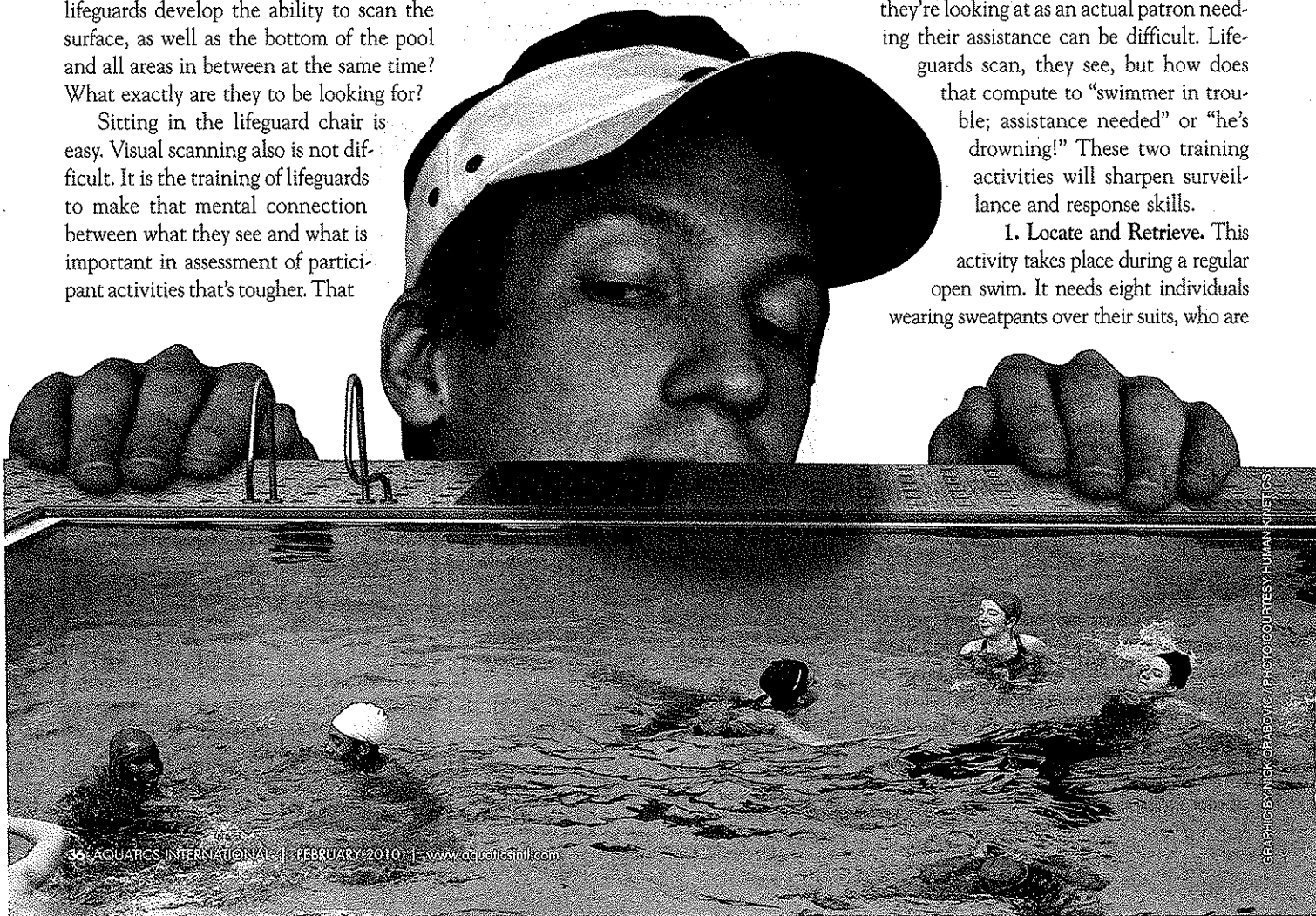
connection involves identifying details, sorting the important from the casual, viewing multiple depth dimensions at the same time, and maintaining a high level of mental focus and processing.

The following two activities can be used to assist individual lifeguards in developing the specific abilities needed for surveillance. Implemented on a random basis

and unannounced ahead of time, each activity can provide a better picture of what an individual lifeguard is actually doing while sitting in that chair. Help clarify the question "Sitting and doing what?" Train your guards to identify what they are looking at through training drills designed to assess and document surveillance.

Training lifeguards to identify what they're looking at as an actual patron needing their assistance can be difficult. Lifeguards scan, they see, but how does that compute to "swimmer in trouble; assistance needed" or "he's drowning!" These two training activities will sharpen surveillance and response skills.

**1. Locate and Retrieve.** This activity takes place during a regular open swim. It needs eight individuals wearing sweatpants over their suits, who are



swimming and playing with the rest of the open swim participants. Regular lifeguards are on duty. In addition, a lifeguard (the one participating in this activity) performs appropriate scanning at one of the guard positions.

An activity monitor with a stopwatch is on deck. Several minutes into the swim period, one of the individuals wearing sweatpants quickly and unobtrusively allows his or her sweatpants to drop off and sink to the bottom. This individual then continues swimming as if nothing had happened.

As soon as the sweatpants drop, the monitor starts the stopwatch and times how long it takes for the participating lifeguard to notice the downed trousers, activate the emergency action procedure, or EAP, by signaling and calling out, "DRILL IN PROGRESS," and retrieving the sweatpants. Time stops when the pants are placed on the deck. The monitor should know which individual is going to drop the pants so time is started promptly.

**The Scan Test pits a lifeguard's observation skills against those of a digital camera, operated by another individual. During the 4- to 5-second scan, a photo of the area is taken. Based on his or her scan, the guard fills in a pool diagram. Comparing the photo and the diagram, testers look for accuracy in number of swimmers, direction of swimmer travel and complete coverage of the scanned area.**

The more individuals in the pool during the open swim aspect of this activity, the harder completion of this activity will be, from the standpoint of scanning and recognition as well as from the standpoint of retrieval. Increase difficulty by varying the color of sweatpants. Darker colors are easier to see against a pool bottom. Vary the size of sweatpants. Larger pants are easier to see and retrieve.

**2. Scan Test.** This activity takes place during a regular open swim. A digital camera, pool diagram on paper, and pencil are needed. All on-duty lifeguards are in their usual positions and aquatic activity proceeds normally. The individual performing the Scan Test takes a position next to one of the on-duty lifeguards and stands with his

or her back to the water. The individual with the digital camera takes a position facing the testing guard.

On a signal, the testing guard turns, faces the pool and performs a 4- to 5-second scan of the area of responsibility he would have if working that station. Following the scan, he turns back to face the camera operator. During the 4- to 5-second scan, the camera operator takes a digital photo (over the shoulder of the testing guard) of the area being scanned.

After the scan is done and the photo taken, the testing guard takes the pool diagram and pencil, making arrows and x's on the diagram to indicate swimmers seen during the scan. Following completion of the diagram, it is compared with the photo for accuracy. When comparing the diagram with the photo, look for accuracy in number of swimmers, direction of swimmer travel, and

complete coverage of the scanned area.

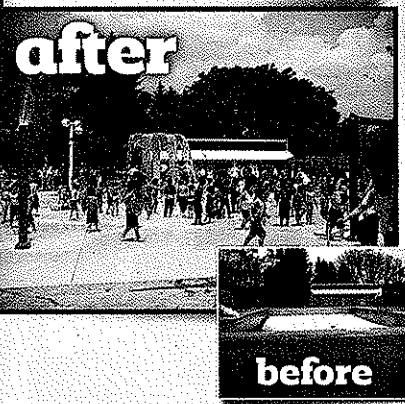
To increase the difficulty of the task, ask predetermined individuals to perform specific tasks during the scan. For example, underwater swimming, surface diving and/or entering/exiting the water. Ask for more specific identity of swimmers, such as cap or suit color, gender or swim ability assessment. ■

*Training activities described here are from Grosse, S. (2009). Lifeguard Training Activities and Games. Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics.*



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