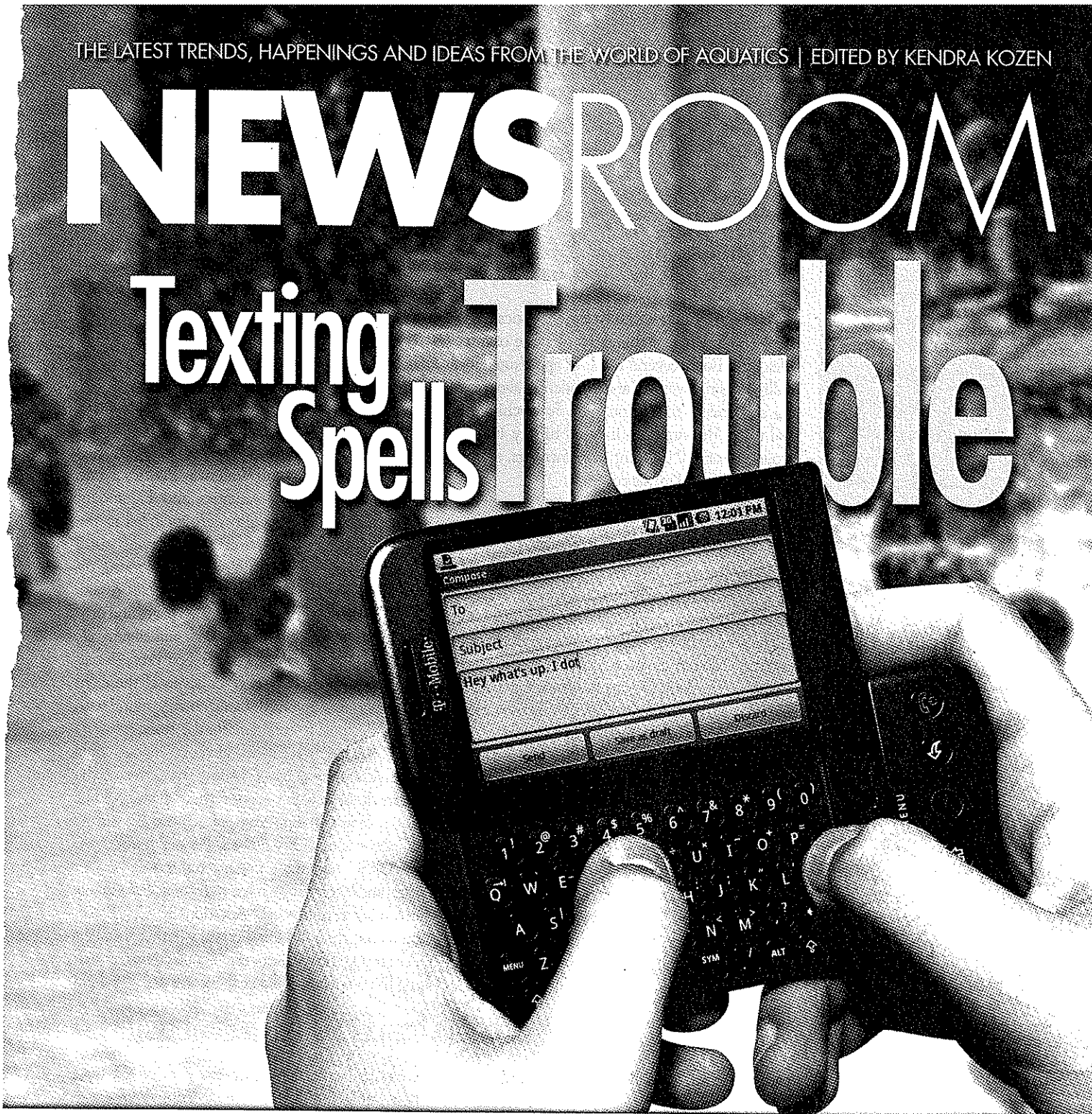


NEWSROOM

Texting Spells Trouble



OMG ... lifeguards are texting while on duty, and experts say supervisors need to do more to stop to it

by Kendra Kozen What's your policy on lifeguard cell phone use? Last summer, media outlets across the nation called attention to a potentially deadly practice: lifeguards texting while on duty.

With summer 2011 in full swing and "there's an app for that" mentality becoming ever more pervasive, experts say it's time for more pool operators to get serious when it

comes to dealing with lifeguard cell phone use.

"It's really starting to affect the industry more and more, just like in general society. But with us, it's a little more dangerous," said Chris Griffith, aquatic supervisor for the city of Paul's Valley, Okla. Griffith also is moderator of the LifeguardLink group on AI Connect. "It's starting to encroach on the safety of our patrons. ..."

News reports last summer included everything from "hidden camera" investigations documenting the problem, to drowning lawsuits claiming the guard responsible for watching the victim was sending and receiving text messages instead.

"I see it from a litigation standpoint an awful lot," said aquatic safety expert Tom
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Griffiths. "Attorneys will subpoena the cell phone records right away now, and that's not exclusive to the pool industry."

If lifeguards have their eyes on their cell phones, how can they be watching the water? Policies prohibiting cell phone use while on duty may seem like a no-brainer, but that practice is "one of the most difficult issues to tackle when it comes to lifeguard surveillance," added Griffiths, founder of the Aquatic Safety Research Group.

Today's lifeguards are so used to having instant access to their various social networks — everything from Facebook to Yelp now can be accessed via cell phone — it can be very difficult to give that up, even for a relatively short time.

"Our younger staffers are almost tethered to their phones," said Kathy Fisher, aquatic director, West Morris (N.J.) Area YMCA. "Being in constant communication has become a way of life for them, and a difficult habit to break even while on the clock at work."

Like many facilities, the West Morris Area YMCA has a "no cell phone" policy in place. Employees are not permitted to use them anywhere on deck or in the glass-enclosed break room. This is an important step, Griffiths said, but many pool operators still haven't formalized such policies. And for those who have, it can be difficult to enforce.

Jamie Freese, aquatics program supervisor for the city of Livonia, Mich., has a "no cell phone on duty" policy in place that supervisors "vigorously enforce." Still, it hasn't been enough to stop some pool employees.

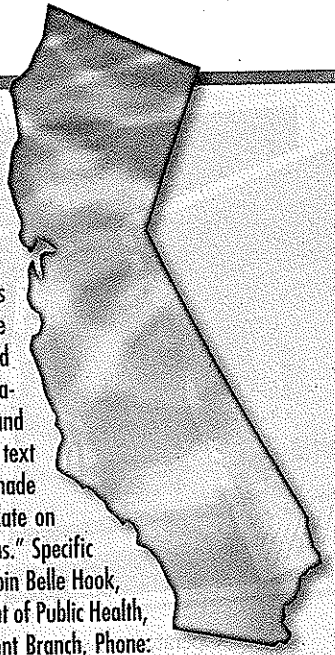
"Attendants at the top of the slide, out of the supervisor's view, have been disciplined for using cell phones," Freese said. "These are not active lifeguards, but to date they have been the only ones 'on duty' to have had issues."

Beyond the challenges of enforcing rules, there's also the question of how to handle situations where a lifeguard must have a cell phone on their person while guarding a pool because that is the only emergency communication option in range of the pool deck.

Ultimately, Griffiths said, "until we, as an industry, figure out something that works for everyone, we're going to continue to have problems with it. There needs to be some sort of a standard practice that's easily adopted."

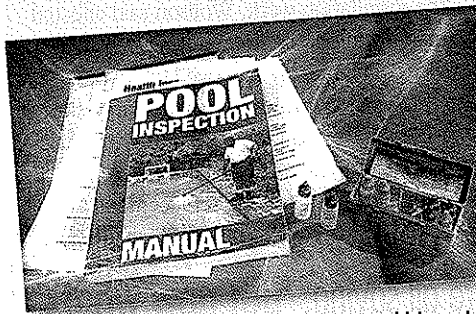
California to Update Pool Standards

The California Building Standards Commission has issued a proposed building code for commercial pools and waterparks on behalf of the California Department of Public Health. According to the policy statement from that department, the goal is to update existing public pool regulations and bring them up to current health/safety standards. The document also indicates that the new standards will add \$4,687 to in costs to each new-pool construction or renovation. A 45-day public comment period ran through June 27 and if any modifications are made based on feedback, "the full text of the proposed modifications, clearly indicated, will be made available to the public for at least 15 days prior to the date on which the CBC adopts, amends, or repeals the regulations." Specific questions on proposed changes should be addressed to Robin Belle Hook, Chief Environmental Services Section, California Department of Public Health, Division of Drinking Water and Environmental Management Branch, Phone: 916.449.5693/E-mail: robinbelle.hook1@cdph.ca.gov.



OC City Questions Lifeguard Pay

Lifeguard pay in one Orange County, Calif., city has attracted worldwide media attention, and in an era when fiscal responsibility reigns, some locals are calling for a review. A report on lifeguard pay in Newport Beach for the calendar year 2010 showed that 13 of the 14 full-time lifeguards collected more than \$120,000 in total compensation. One received more than \$98,160. The guards are represented by the Lifeguard Management Association, and the biggest questions over the guards' compensation involve pensions. "My view is that beach lifeguards are public safety professionals and should be paid commensurate, but the pay of lifeguards is not the primary issue in this debate," said B. Chris Brewster, president of the United States Lifesaving Association, in response to a discussion of the issue on AI Connect. "The primary issue is that the pay they have been granted by the Newport Beach City Council is being used as an excuse on the part of some to justify reducing public safety."



State to Eliminate Inspections?

New Hampshire could become the first state to balance its budget by eliminating its pool inspection program. Potential savings generated by the unprecedented move could potentially reach \$139,000, according to an Associated Press report on *Forbes.com*. Opponents argue cutting inspections

could hurt the state's \$4 billion tourism industry, and, as of press time, alternatives were being considered. "Environmental Services Commissioner Thomas Burack says without the program, people would be at greater risk of lung, skin and eye infections as well as gastric illnesses," the AP report noted.

APSP Model Code Moves Toward Completion

The Association of Pool & Spa Professionals and the International Code Council are continuing to move forward on development of a new model code. The International Swimming Pool and Spa Code passed the first of two sets of hearings recently and is set to be finalized in November. Three years in the making, the new code outlines barriers and entrapment prevention, and addresses topics such as plumbing and construction practices. If it continues on its current track, the code may be published as early as March 2012, and states and municipalities would potentially incorporate the APSP standards into their laws.

