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Anatomy of the Passive Victim Rescue

It's vital that lifeguards are adept at rescuing such victims in any water depth

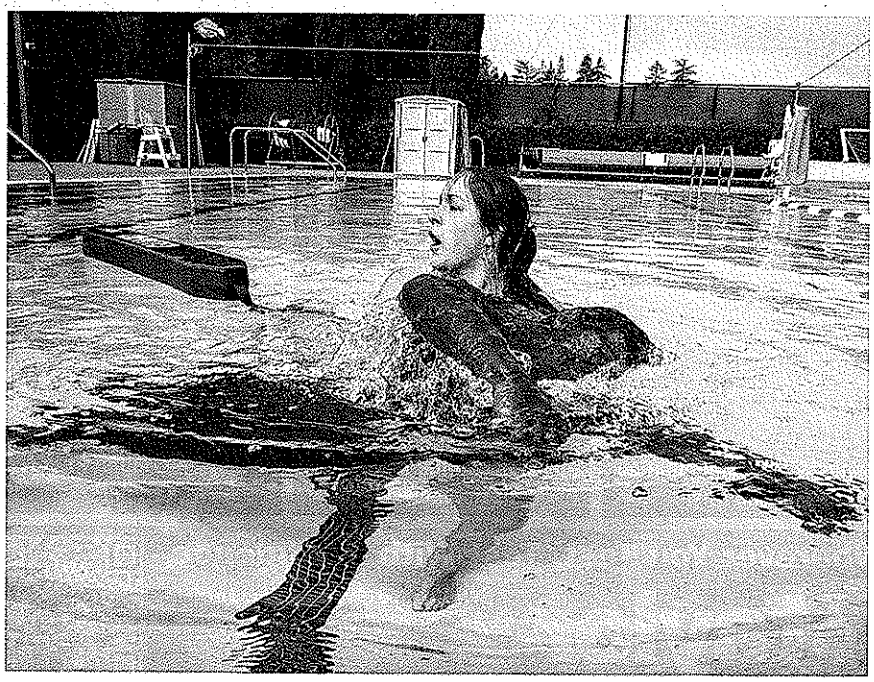
Some lifeguards believe that their ability to successfully rescue defines their identity as a lifeguard. We must understand the components of the rescue: entry, approach and rescue. Rescue is broken into three components: contact, securing the victim and retrieval to safety. With each component, personal safety and a sense of urgency must be exercised. Lifeguards must be able to perfect the skill of rescuing active and passive victims alike. This article focuses only on drills for a passive nonspinal victim in shallow water, mid-depth and deep water.

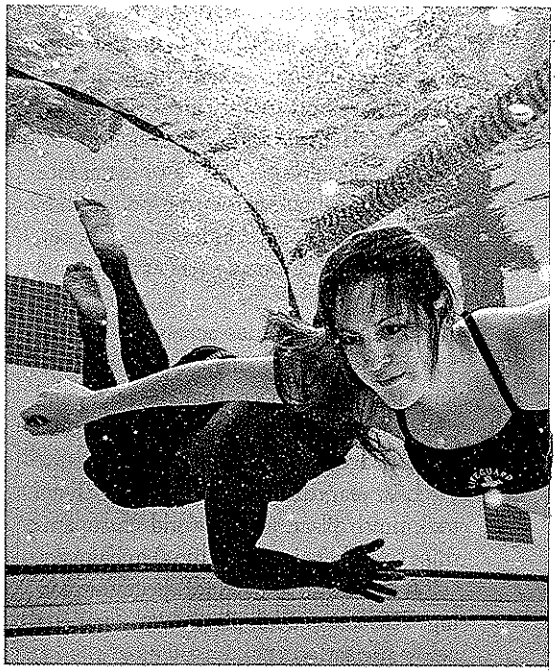
Rescuing a passive victim has its challenges. The victim's body is limp, requiring the lifeguard to physically manage and secure the victim onto the rescue tube. The victim's size, whether small child or large adult, dramatically changes the effort needed to make the rescue. Training on passive victims is at times overlooked due to active rescues offering a little more immediate excitement. Still, passive victim rescue training should be done, and shallow water is a great starting point.

Shallow water (3 to 5-foot depth) provides an optimum environment for rescuers to build their proficiency before moving to mid-depth (5 to 9 feet) and deep water (9 feet plus). Shallow water provides a certain level of comfort and certainty. This depth allows the rescuer full access to the victim: left, right, front, back, top and bottom. If the victim is floating on the surface, the rescuer can maneuver around the victim with relative ease.

Shallow water also provides the rescuer easy access to air, allowing the rescuer to focus on developing rescue techniques without having to tread water and breathe. If the victim is submerged, shallow water provides a short distance to surface for air. And if something goes awry, the rescuer and the victim can stop the drill and stand up.

Shallow water allows the rescuer to focus on making contact and securing





PHOTOS BY PETE DEQUINCY

the victim to the rescue tube. The rescuer should be able to make safe and effective contact with the victim in these positions: floating on the surface, face up or face down, facing away or toward the rescuer, and submerged facing away or toward the rescuer. Securing the victim means the victim is placed on the rescue tube face up, with their airway open, and the victim is in a stable position on the rescue tube. Stability is demonstrated by the rescuer being able to release their hands from the victim and tube, and the victim staying on the tube.

Why hands free? If the victim requires airway management before being removed from the water, the rescuer should be able to reach for their fanny pack, be able to remove their pocket mask and use it on the victim. Remember, for a passive victim in the water, securing the airway is the priority; determining the victim's level of consciousness follows. Passive conscious victim: monitor airway. Passive unconscious victim: Secure their airway, extricate if possible and provide care.

Passive victim rescue, shallow-water drill: Have the victim 10 feet from the edge, face up on the surface, facing away from the rescuer. The water depth should be between 3½ to 4½ feet. The rescuer should have a least one hand on the edge, with the rescue tube strap on. **Objective:** The rescuer needs to reach the victim and secure them onto the rescue tube. Once the victim is secured, the rescuer places their arms in the air, thus hands free. **Timing goal:** 5 seconds to complete the objective. Once proficient, incorporate these variations:

> Victim is face up on surface, facing the rescuer (no change).

> Victim is face down on surface, facing away/facing the rescuer (5 to 7 seconds).

> Victim is face down, submerged, facing away/facing the rescuer (7 to 10 seconds).

> Victim is face down, submerged, facing away/facing the rescuer; add towing in preparation for extrication (10 to 12 seconds).

Passive victim rescue, mid-depth/deep-water drill: Have the victim 10 feet from the edge, face up on the surface, facing away from the rescuer. Mid-depth water should be 5 to 7 feet, and deep water will be 8 to 12 feet. The rescuer will start on the deck with the rescue tube strap on. **Objective:** The rescuer needs to enter the water safely to reach the victim and secure them onto the rescue tube. Once the victim is secured, the rescuer places their arms in the air, thus hands free. **Timing goal:** 5 seconds to complete the objective.

Submerged victims will be at least 1 to 3 feet underwater in a vertical position; fully submerged victims will be horizontal on the bottom of the pool. Note: If either the rescuer or victim is struggling with equalizing pressure while underwater, avoid the submerged drills. Once proficient, incorporate these variations:

> Victim is face up on the surface, facing the rescuer (no change).

> Victim is face down on the surface, facing away/facing the rescuer (5 seconds).

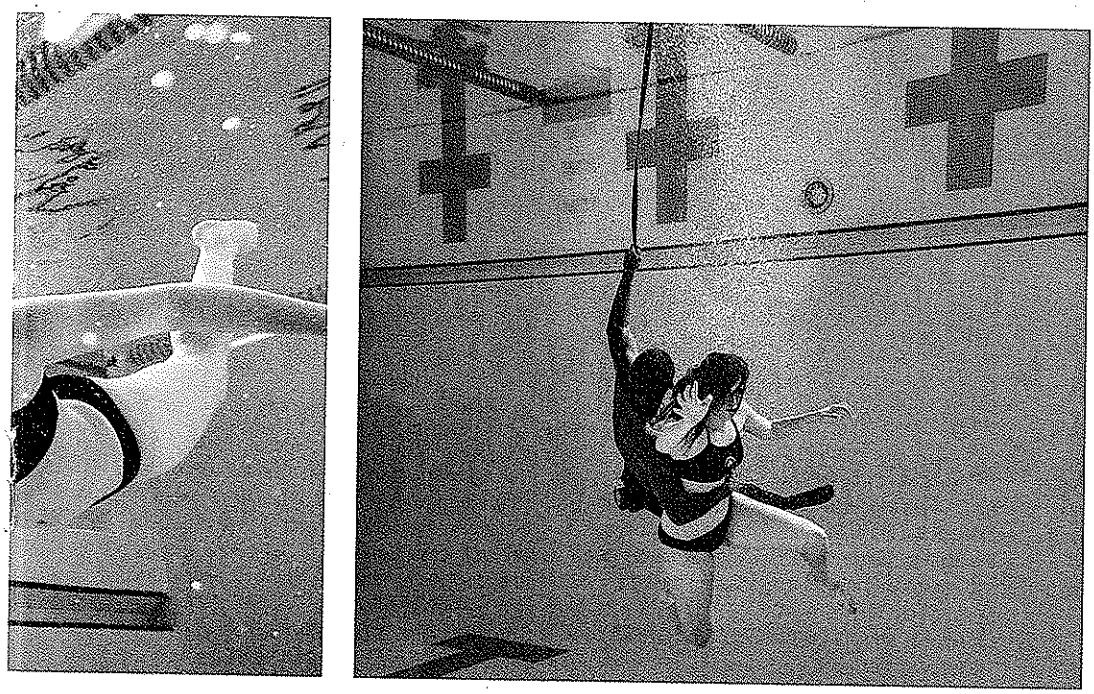
> Victim is face down, submerged, facing away/facing the rescuer (5 to 7 seconds).

> Victim is face down, fully submerged, facing away/facing the rescuer (10 to 12 seconds).

The difficulty of mid-depth and deep-water drills will be the rescuer's inability to stand, requiring the rescuer to either tread water or swim while securing the victim.

Rescue tube placement on the back of the victim might vary depending on the victim's body type and muscle mass. Avoid having the victim slide off the rescue tube or drift into a vertical position. Entanglement with the rescue tube tow line is a possibility, so encourage lifeguards to be cognizant if they get separated from their rescue tubes.

With any of these drills, it will take time and practice to become proficient. Have patience, have fun and keep training.



TO THE RESCUE A submerged victim in shallow water provides a good opportunity for lifeguards to hone their skills (far left). Rescuing mid-depth victims should be part of your in-service training curriculum if the water depth is available (center). For deep-water rescues, focus on quick and effective execution of the rescue (right).