



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

AQUATICS SAFETY—THE BOY SCOUT WAY

SUMMARY

Since the inception of Scouting, learning to swim and engaging in aquatics activities have been core to the program. More than 1.5 million aquatics-related merit badges have been earned by Boy Scouts since 2009. The BSA has also been a leader in promoting and providing training in aquatics safety. For at least 80 years, checklists have been in place to make sure those aquatic experiences are positive ones. Back in the 1940s there was the seven-defense method, a precursor to today's Safe Swim Defense.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Take Scouts near any body of water—whether it's a pool, lake, river, or ocean—and they have a natural desire to go swimming. Once a Scout has learned how to swim, he naturally wants to progress into other aquatics activities, including sailing, rowing, canoeing, and rafting. There are plenty of [age-appropriate aquatics activities](#).

But before that swim or row, we want everyone to have a plan and be on the same page when it comes to aquatics safety in the BSA program. The two key training prerequisites are Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat. These are not learn-to-swim or learn-to-paddle courses; they are the “Boy Scout way” to conduct a safe and fun aquatics program.

Both courses can be found on my.Scouting.org and taken online anytime. All leaders are encouraged to take the training and at least one adult needs the training when unit aquatics activities are conducted. Upon course completion, leaders should be able to understand the key points of each program.

- Qualified supervision, personal health review, safe area, response personnel, lookout, ability groups, buddy system, and discipline make up the eight points of the BSA's Safe Swim Defense.
- Qualified supervision, personal health review, swimming ability, life jackets, buddy system, skill proficiency, planning, equipment, and discipline make up the nine points of the BSA's Safety Afloat.

Many camps and council aquatics committees offer these basic courses in person, in addition to higher level skill courses for unit leadership including Aquatics Supervision: Swimming & Water Rescue and Paddle Craft Safety. Should older youth or leadership wish to further hone their lifesaving skills, BSA Lifeguard certification is available.

REFERENCES

- Aquatics Resources: <http://www.scouting.org/OutdoorProgram/Aquatics/forms.aspx>
- Safety Afloat training and Safe Swim Defense training: my.Scouting.org
- *Aquatics Supervision: A leader's guide to youth swimming and boating activities* (item 621005 at www.scoutstuff.org)
- *Canoeing, Kayaking, Lifesaving, Motorboating, Rowing, Scuba Diving, Small-Boat Sailing, Swimming, Water Sports, and Whitewater* merit badge pamphlets