



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



BEACH & PROTECTED SWIMMING SITE CLOSURES BEST PRACTICES

Beaches and other designated and protected swimming sites, such as lakes and rivers, may need to be closed for various reasons.

- An insufficient number of lifeguards.
- Dangerous water conditions, such as rip currents.
- Poor water quality, as determined by NJDEP or NJDOH testing.

This leaves public officials and lifeguard leaders questioning how to best close a beach, a section of beach, river-side, or lake-side swimming areas. The following best practices can be used to control swimming on unprotected beaches & swimming sites.

- **Generally, the best risk control practice is to either fully guard the area or not to guard the area at all. It should be made clear to the visitor that swimming is either protected or not protected.**
- Warning signs should be clearly posted at accesses to closed swimming sites. Recommends language such as “**Beach Is Unprotected - No Swimming Permitted**” or “**Unprotected Beach - Lifeguards Not On Duty.**” Signs must be in English. Other languages are optional. Consult with your agency’s attorney on verbiage and icons.
- If certain sections of beaches will still be protected by lifeguards, such as in late August or even into early September, it is a good practice to also direct the user to beaches that are protected.
- If a beach or swimming site is closed or unprotected, lifeguards should not be present or visible. This can give the impression the beach is protected. Similarly, uniformed police dedicated to patrolling the beach on foot or in vehicles instead of lifeguards is not recommended. Police officers on routine patrol should be encouraged to pay special attention to the area(s) and enforce bathing regulations.
- Some local government agencies have initiated programs to patrol the beaches with a crew that drives up and down the beach from when lifeguards go off duty until dusk. This after-hours policy should clearly state that lifeguards are off duty and the waters are not being guarded by the response team, as normal water surveillance ceases when those guards go off duty. Making the public aware of this distinction is critical, so websites, signage, municipal or county Facebook page, etc., should be utilized.
- If standby rescue crews are available, they too should be quartered out of sight and their equipment accessible but not visible to the public.
- Once a schedule for closing swimming sites is established, the agency should announce the schedule through every media outlet available, including press releases, social media, agency webpages, and signage. Having pre-scripted messages that can be used each year will facilitate this process.
- All employees should know the beach closure schedule, including emergency service personnel, the clerk, the chief administrative officer, and elected officials. A consistent message is the goal. Better information provides better safety to everyone.