
SURF SAVE – extending the concept from Brazil to Portugal

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Portugal has a great surf tradition and surfers of all ages and skill level are regularly on the beach, be it a patrolled or unpatrolled, from dawn to dusk, all year round. After realizing that many assistances and water rescues performed outside the bathing season or at beaches without lifeguards were mostly carried out by surfers, the Portuguese National Lifesaving Institute (ISN) decided to improve their knowledge of prevention, rescue by using their surfboard and first aid techniques providing free courses.

After a careful research on best practices in the field and considering the success of "Surf Save" in Brazil developed by SOBRASA, ISN adopted a similar strategy and in March 2014 "Surf Save – Portugal" was born with the support of the Portuguese Surf Federation, sponsored by Lidl Portugal.

The main objective of this project was to reduce the number of drownings providing the surfers with basic knowledge of how to prevent drowning and injuries to themselves and others, to help without becoming a victim and provide basic life support. Furthermore surfers can be of great help at patrolled beaches assisting the lifeguards on their duties and help to multiply the message of prevention at the beach.

Method

The concept was the same as its "mother" project in Brazil. It encompasses surfers above 14 years old in any of the different surfing categories: long-board, short-board, surfboard, body-board or Stand-up paddleboard, all together, and everyone is invited to bring their own surfboard. So, the course takes one morning and includes practical learning of introduction to lifesaving, the surfer-lifeguard team, what is ISN's role, prevention, beach waves, wind and currents, drowning recognition and alerting, providing floatation, in-water Basic Life Support using the surfboard, Basic life support, Drowning classification and appropriate treatment.

Result

In Portugal, the project was launched in two phases. First, training was provided to members of the ISN, surf teachers and coaches so that they could spread the message later. In total 60 people participated in this training course delivered by SOBRASA. The second phase of the project consisted in delivering free courses around the country in surf schools during summer season. In total 34 courses were delivered along 2014 reaching more than 2040 surfers around the country. As an interesting result some of the surfers attending the training reported to have saved people lives in different situations just after the course.

Conclusion

Surfers are not too concerned with water safety and drowning prevention but rather on catching a good wave, and are exposed to high-risk situations both as potential victim and as an untrained rescuer. Hence, providing surfers with basic water safety skills can not only assist lifeguards on duty but also equip surfers with techniques to assist others in need when lifeguards are not nearby. The implementation of this project showed that using other countries' experience, knowledge and best practices, not only strengthens international partnerships around drowning prevention but also can be of great help to speed up the process of development and implementation proved successful strategies in other countries.