

Water safety certification for swimming pools – A new Brazilian proposal

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Background

Brazil has an estimated 1,7 million pools with an estimated associate risk of 1 death/639 pools, considering 20 years the average lifetime of a pool. Currently, high standard services are considered a way to better target customers. Tourism was among the first to classify their level of comfort, safety and hospitality by categorizing their hotels from 1-5 stars. Sadly, water-safety, an important segment of this model, has not received the attention needed.

In 2005, SOBRASA created a water safety certification program for pools, using a set of qualifying criteria for hotels, water parks and condominiums; aiming to reduce accidents in and around pools by providing a list of required behaviors and actions for owners/managers, pursuing the water safety quality certification. Back then, 3 certification possibilities were awarded based on the level of efficacy within which the evaluated locations reached a minimum of criteria requested in the evaluation form.

Certificates were divided in Bronze(80%), Silver(90%) and Gold(100%), based on the fulfillment of 50 evaluation items, encompassing general aquatic safety facilities, quality of medical assistance, lifeguard assistance, lifesaving and medical essential equipment, emergency communication system, lifeguards' working protocols, and lifeguard water fitness and professional skills. From 2005-2011, only 4 pools managed to obtain certification, all Bronze, due to difficulties regarding the large number of items that institutions had to comply. The program was updated to a simpler version detailed below <http://www.sobrasa.org/piscinasegura-academias-clubes-e-piscinas-coletivas/>

POOL+SAFE campaign was created focusing on 5 messages:

1. Pay 100% attention to your child; be at an arm distance, even when a lifeguard is on duty.
2. Occlude the access to pools using fences and self-locking gates.
3. Ought to learn how to act when a drowning happens.
4. Lifeguard on duty – all the time in collective pools.
5. Suction – Avoid it – Provide ways to turn off the pump while using it and have an anti-hair drain.

The program uses an impacting motto. "The POOL+SAFE campaign draws your attention to 5 steps that may change the future of our children by increasing the safety of your pool. By simply using the word "POOLS" you can easily recall how to vaccinate your pool against drowning giving 95% of protection to your child with one shot."

POOL+SAFE alliance was created involving 18 governmental and non-profit organizations: health-related, swimming federations, pool manufacturers, Fire Department, Physical Education Councils, children safety institutes and Portuguese Lifesaving organizations.

The Program changed its target to clubs, gyms and swim schools, usually managed by a swimming teacher, who might be more aware of the need for water-safety and be an easier way to proliferate the message.

A 3-phase access was designed to make adherence to the certification program easier: 1st – An invitation to join the POOL+SAFE campaign was sent to target institutions which only had to comply with one item and host a commemorative week to disseminate safety tips; 2nd – SOBRASA offered for free a 5h online educational course on water safety for all employees of the institution, and a pool qualification support for the owners; 3rd – The institution complies with the 5 mandatory items and requests formal certification. This is the only part that has costs to cover a certification Kit (banners, stickers, comic books, magnets, t-shirts, and plate). Certification allows the use of SOBRASA's logo in their establishment as well as on lifeguards uniforms. Certification is valid for 2 years and can be announced in any place.

A death in a swimming facility discredits the institution and the socio-economic load is extremely high. Therefore, managers of aquatic facilities should acknowledge the water-safety certification extreme value not only for the safety but also for the business.