

Open Water Safety 101: Life Jackets, Boating and Risk Reduction

Morag MacKay, Safe Kids Worldwide (moderator)

Greg Desmond, Aquatics & Recreation Supervisor, Sonoma County Regional Parks

Troy Faletra, Vice President, Life Jacket Association

Kelli Toth, UnderwayUSA



Life Jacket Association

Troy Faletra, Founder/CEO, ThrowRaft
Vice President, LJA Board of Directors



Life Jacket Association

The purpose of the Life Jacket Association is to promote the interests of the water safety community by advancing the use and proper wear of life jackets, with the goal of saving lives and preventing drowning.



Who we are

- Nonprofit 501c3
- Membership Association
 - Life Jacket & Associated Equipment Manufacturers
 - Testing Labs
 - Government
 - Nonprofits
- Education, Regulations, Innovation



My Story

After sinking my boat offshore of the Florida coastline, I swam 9 miles to shore.

What was supposed to be a fun afternoon of fishing turned into a nightmare in just minutes.

This experience changed my life forever.



Need for Education

4,083 unintentional drowning deaths each year. ¹

#1 cause of death for children **ages 1–4**. ¹

#2 cause of unintentional death for **ages 5–14**. ¹

In recreational boating where drowning was the cause of death, **87% of victims were not wearing a life jacket**. ²

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/data-research/facts/index.html>

² USCG Recreational Boating Statistics report (2024)



Life Jacket Technician Course

- Confusion on styles and use cases
- Education and confidence for general public
- Professional development and training for water safety professionals (Full Time/Seasonal)
- Can be applied to open water, boating, pools, water parks, etc.



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Life Jacket Technician Course

Nationally recognized certificate program, developed by the Life Jacket Association.

- History of Life Jackets
- Life Jacket Selection
- How to Properly Size and Fit
- How to Maintain



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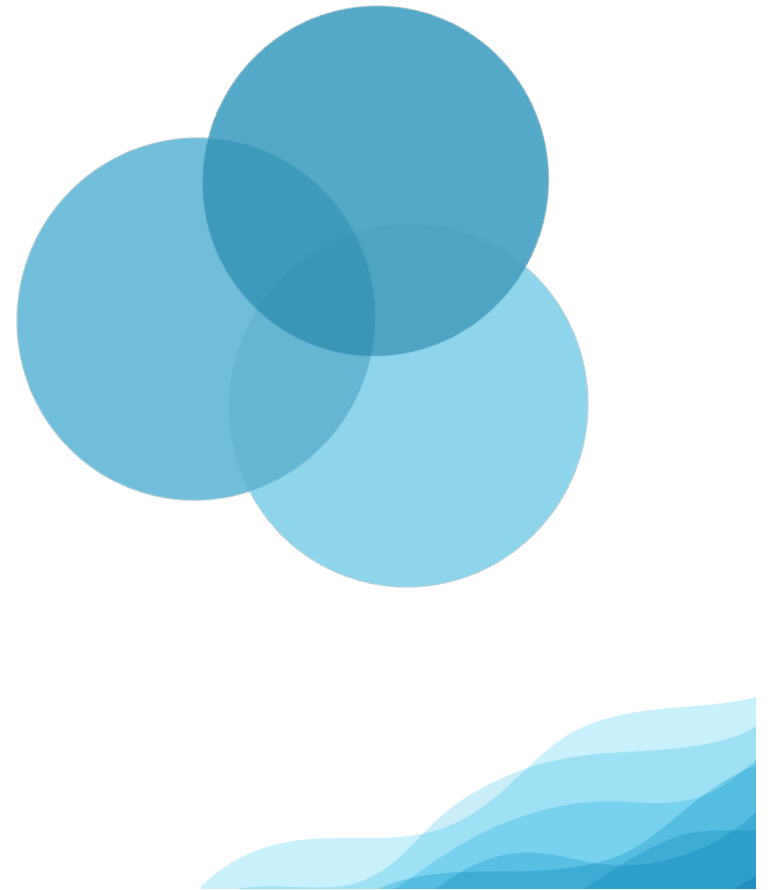
Life Jacket Technician Course

- Developed in partnership with Kalkomey, a nationally recognized online provider of recreational safety education.
- Certificate and digital badge upon completion
- Offered in English and Spanish



Commitment to Impact

- Education and resources
- Relevant to boating, watersports, swimming, outdoor recreation
- Layers of safety
- Safety for all ages
- Partnerships



Life Jacket Association



Troy Faletra, Founder/CEO, ThrowRaft
Vice President, LJA Board of Directors
troy@throwraft.com



www.lifejacketassociation.org

www.lifejacketassociation.org/lifejackettechniciancourse





PFD and Life Jacket Messaging for Open Water Safety

**Kelli Toth, Director Underway USA
Member, U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan
Life Jacket Working Group**

May 12, 2026



**Loaner Board
Life Jackets**



**Mendenhall River
COMMUNITY SCHOOL**
Instructor
Training



**In-Water
Training**



**Shoreside
Training**

Online Learning
Official Boater Education Certificate

Certificate Number 0000112244	Certification Date 01/01/2024
Birth Date 01/20/1988	Ht Wt Eye 6'2 225 Blue
Driver Anchor 5050 Deckside Dr Bligeburg, USA 75065	

Recademics.com

UnderwayUSA
Comprehensive Water Safety Solutions



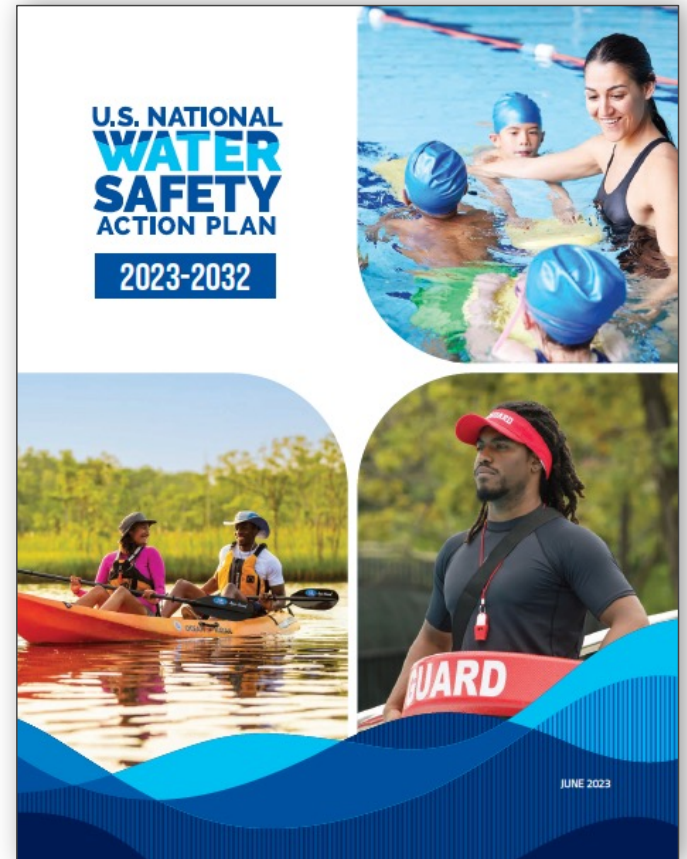
Kelli Toth
Underwayusa.@gmail.com

Vision

A United States where **everyone** is safe in, on, and around water.

Mission

Prevent drowning in the United States through evidence-informed action. Transform the country into a nation where water safety is a natural part of everyday life and people enjoy the benefits of water, safely.



U.S. NATIONAL
**WATER
SAFETY**
ACTION PLAN

PFD and Life Jacket Messaging National Implications

- #3: Develop a multi-year comprehensive coordinated national water safety awareness campaign with consistent messaging.
- #29: Obtain national consensus on recommendations for use of PFDs, life jackets and flotation aids while participating in open water recreational activities.
- #30: Obtain national consensus on recommendations for use of life jackets while boating, swimming, or other water-related activities.



USNWSAP Life Jacket Working Group Project

- Shared messages and guidance around PFD and life jacket use.
- Definitions for PFD, Life Jacket, and Flotation Device, including what to look for when purchasing, fitting, and usage for each.
- Recommendations for PFDs and life jackets for all ages and environments:
 - In, on, around natural water, boating, human-propelled vessels, pools
 - Type or Level of PFD or life jacket needed
 - When and how to use PFDs and life jackets
 - What to do, or not do, with supporting arguments and/or data

What are examples of questions addressed?

- How do I pick a PFD or life jacket for myself? For my child? For an infant?
- What if I have a child with a physical, developmental, or sensory need?
- When are PFDs or life jackets used in open water outside of a boat?
- What does turning ability mean and why does it matter?
- Why is a PFD or life jacket needed if I know how to swim?
- Do I still need to supervise as carefully if my child wears a PFD or life jacket?

What Topic Areas Have Been Clarified?

- When to use PFD and when to use life jacket
- How to bring in the broader context of flotation
- When to use PFDs or life jackets
 - in open water like lakes, rivers or the ocean
 - in pools
 - for infants

Personal Flotation Devices

Wear a PFD, make sure it fits.

Wearables

Life Jackets

Turns unconscious person face up



Buoyancy Aids

Requires some effort of movement



Throwables



Life Jackets: Turns most people face up without effort.

Buoyancy Aids: Require some movement to remain face up.

Throwables: Attach a throw bag or floating line for ease of retrieval.

UnderwayUSA

How can you use this new information?

- Use this working document as a source for up-to-date information.
- Review your training guides and materials; update them for consistency.
- Create public education materials and social media
- Focus on questions you've heard and the types of water recreation in your own community.

What happens next with the messaging document?

- Share with national, state and local organizations
- Integrate with state and local plans
- Feedback is welcome-consensus takes time!
- Designed to be a working document with another review in 2027
- Create opportunities to work together to save lives

Comments and questions are welcome:
info@watersafetyplan.us





K-12 Personal Floatation Device National Standard

Why a New Standard?

- Applies to boating and all water activities for educating Kindergarten-12th graders.
- Designed for in-classroom, camp, in-water, or any setting.
- Increases water competency and water confidence to compliment swim lessons.

Addresses USNWSAP Recommendation to Establish National Minimum Educational Standards for Life Jacket Fit and Usage.



To Learn More

info@watersafetyplan.us
<https://watersafetyplan.us>



K-12 PFD Education Standard

K-12 PFD National Standard

U.S. NATIONAL
**WATER
SAFETY**
ACTION PLAN

Acknowledgements

The USNWSAP Steering Committee gratefully acknowledges the leadership and contributions of the USNWSAP Life Jacket Working Group Co-chairs Elizabeth “Tizzy” Bennett, Kelli Toth, and Adam Katchmarchi, as well as Working Group members: Angela Beale Tawfeeq, Tom Dardis, Pete DeQuincy, Tina Dessart, Megan Ferraro, Dana Gage, Karissa Fleming, Connie Harvey, Liz Huber, Morag MacKay, Jonathan Midgett, Lindsay Mondick, Alison Petri, Kevin Post, Jennifer Proctor, Linda Quan, and Shabana Yusef.

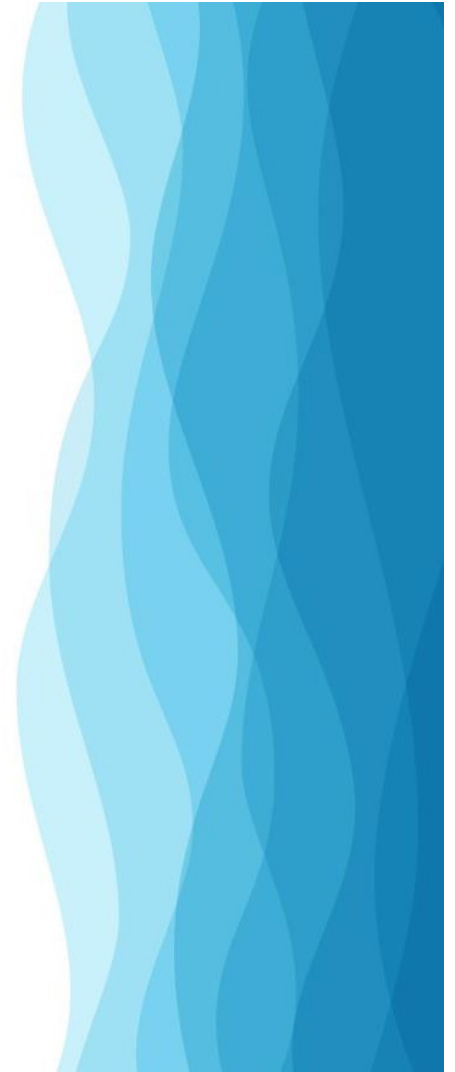
The Steering Committee also extends its appreciation to the many water safety experts, including professionals working in government, nonprofit, and healthcare settings, as well as parents and caregivers, whose insights and expertise helped inform this work.



Sonoma County Regional Parks



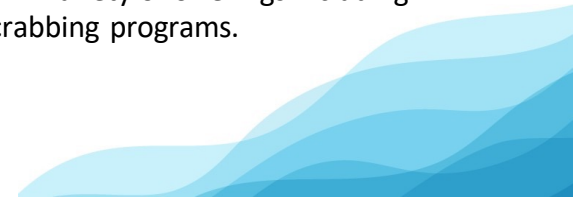
Open Water Lifeguard Team



Aquatics Program Overview



- Approximately 35 Lifeguards and 12 Water Park Staff
- 2 main beaches of lifeguard operations: Spring Lake Lagoon and Healdsburg Veterans Memorial Beach
- Water Park and Boat Rental Operations at Spring Lake Park
- River Patrol
- Lifejacket Loaner Program
- Vamos a Nadar
- Junior Lifeguard Camp and Lifeguard-In-Training (LGIT) Program
- Recreational Programs: A variety of offerings including hiking, paddling, and crabbing programs.



Spring Lake Lagoon





Healdsburg Veterans Memorial Beach



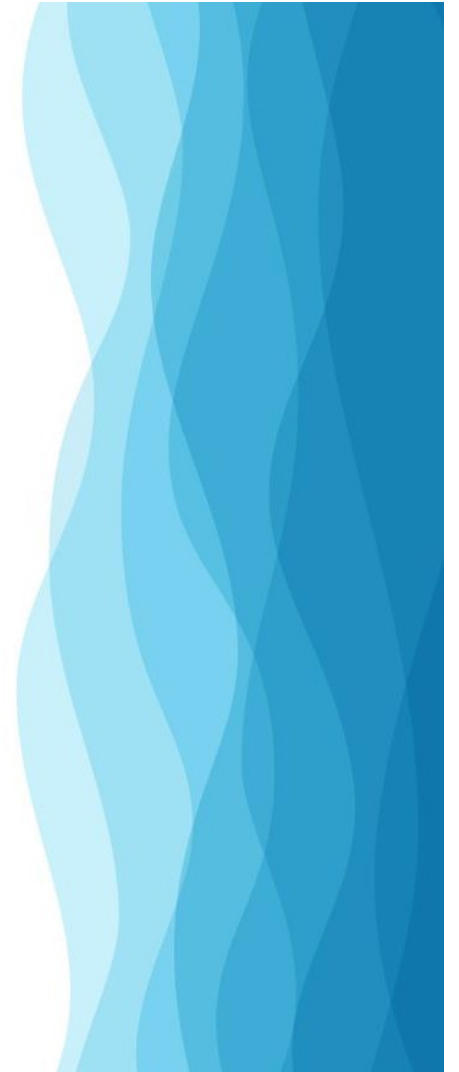


United States Lifesaving Association

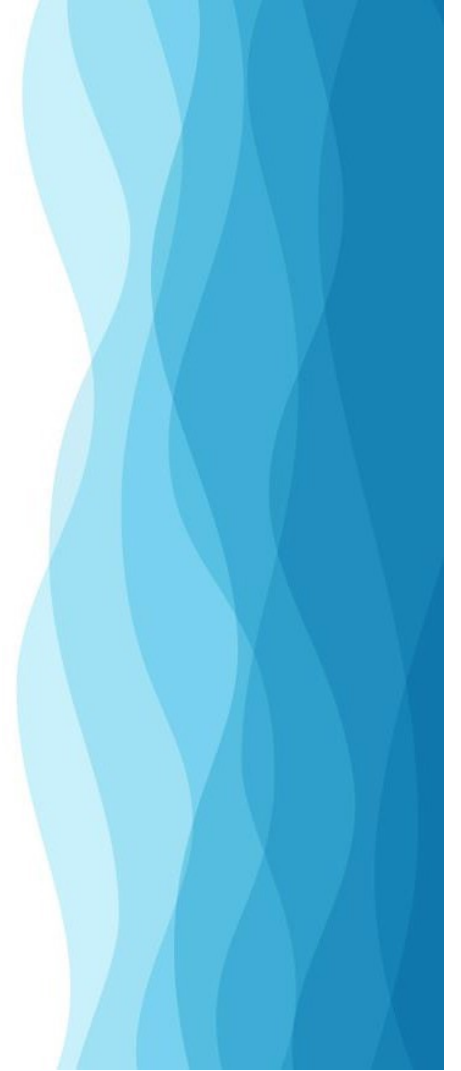
- The United States Lifesaving Association is America's nonprofit, professional association of beach lifeguards and open water rescuers. The USLA works to reduce the incidence of death and injury in the aquatic environment through public education, national lifeguard standards, training programs, promotion of high levels of lifeguard readiness, and other means.

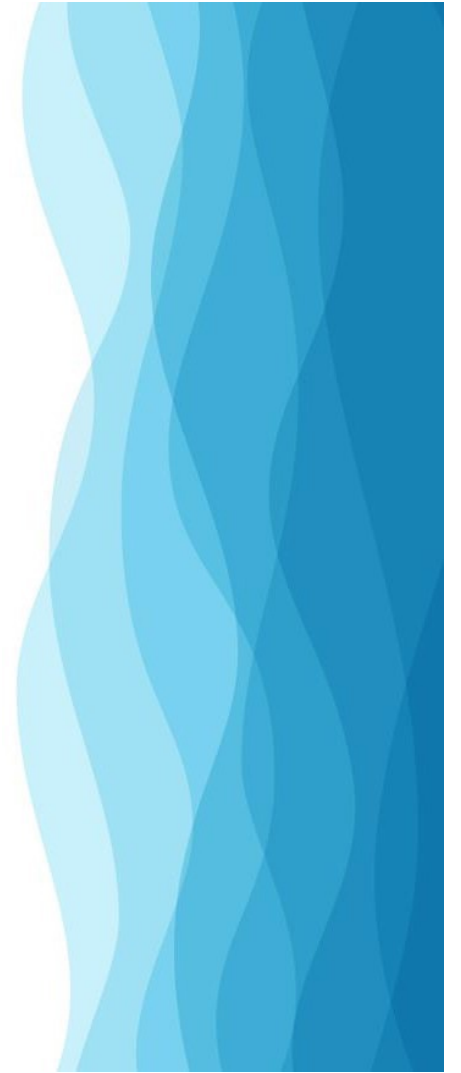


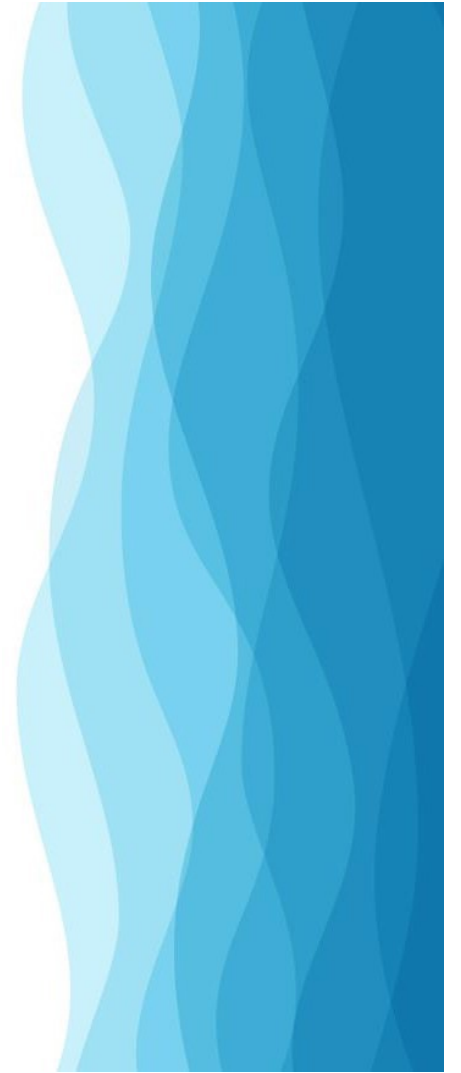
Vamos a Nadar







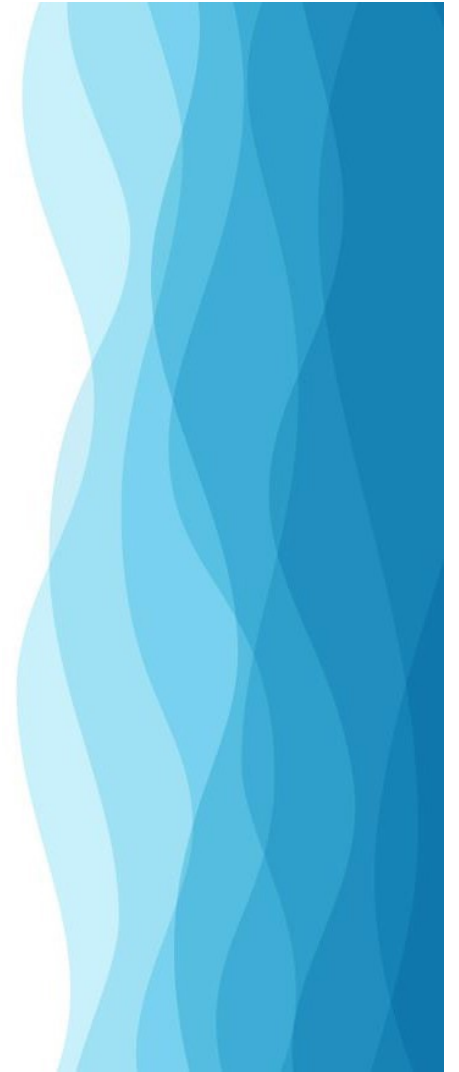


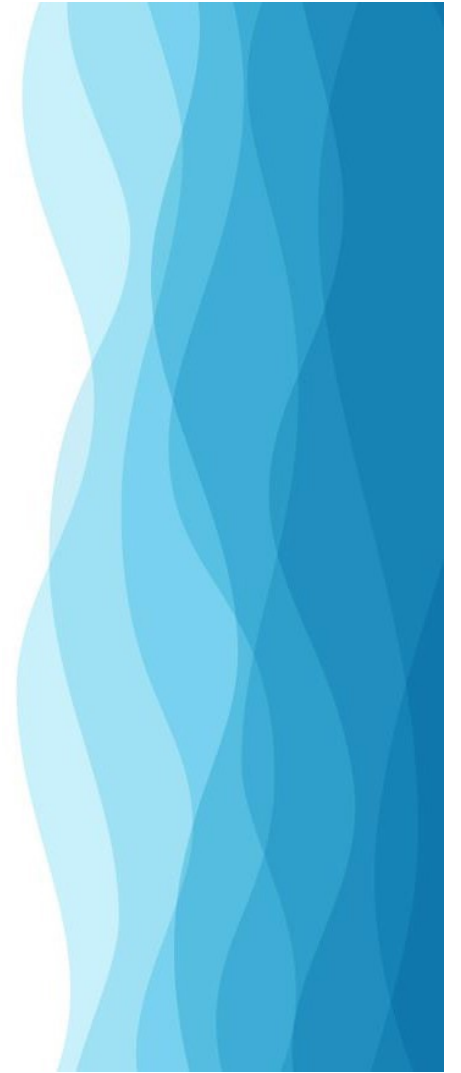


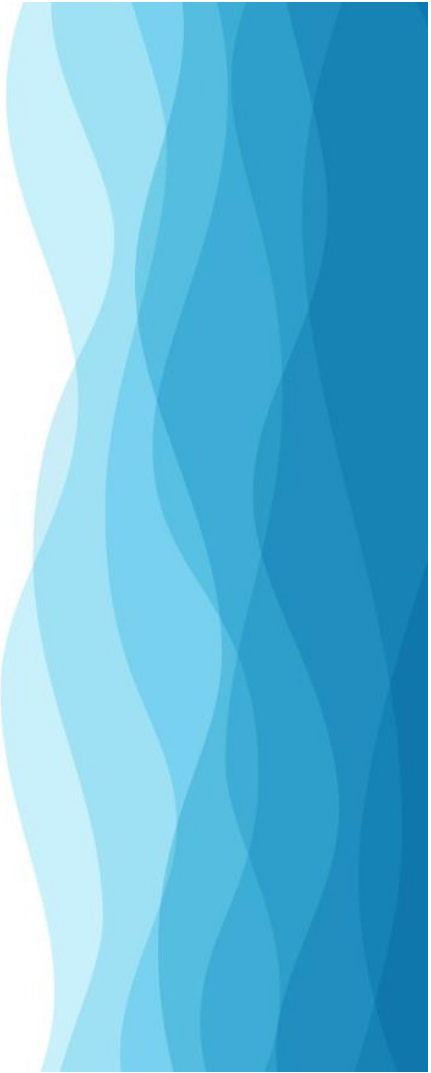


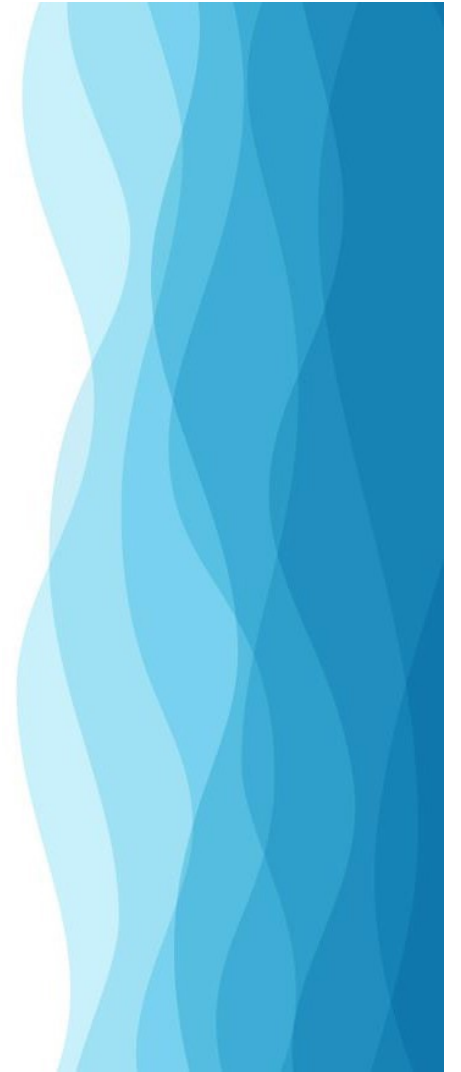


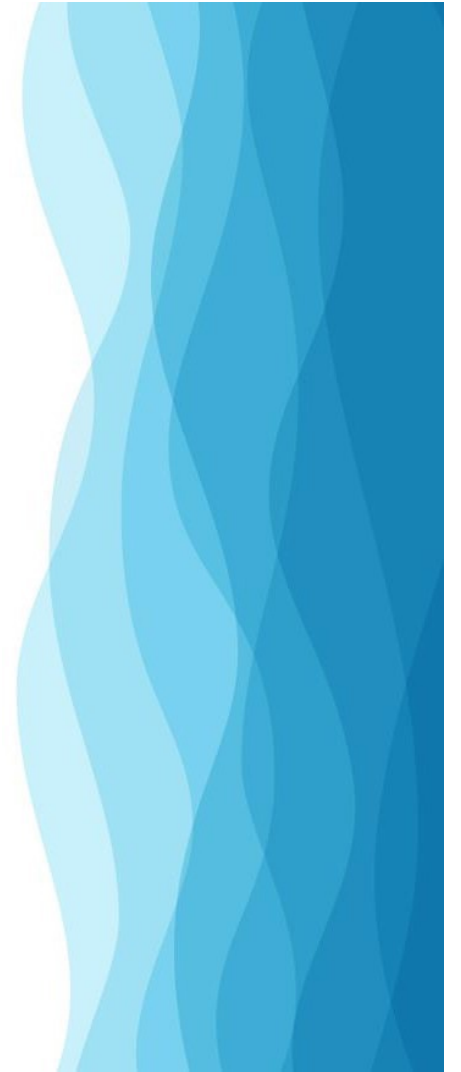
Junior Lifeguard Camp





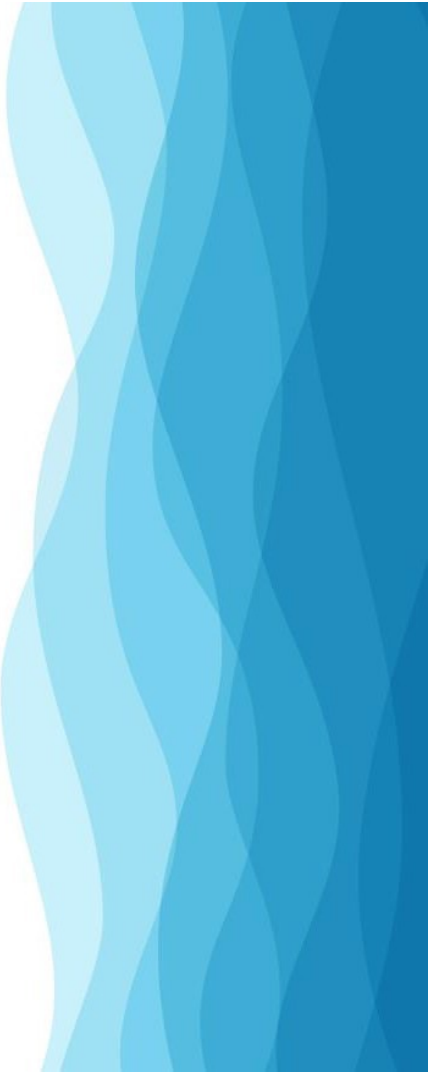


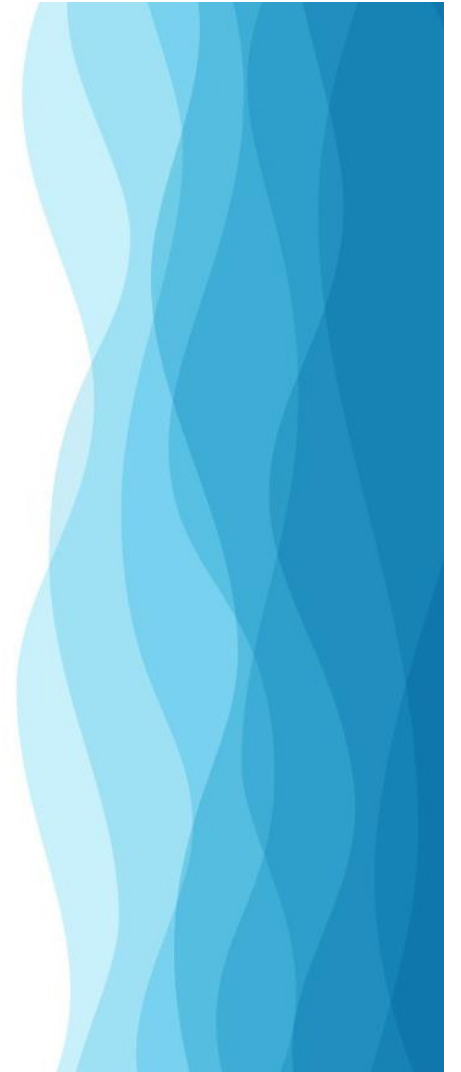




River Patrol















An aerial photograph showing a crowded beach area. The beach is filled with people and colorful umbrellas. To the left of the beach is a multi-lane highway with several cars. The water to the right is a vibrant turquoise color. The word "Questions?" is overlaid in white text in the center of the image.

Questions?



**ONE TEAM.
ONE MISSION.**
REGISTER TODAY!
World's Largest Swimming Lesson
June 25, 2026

WLSL.org

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SAVE THE DATES: 2026 Water Safety Webinar Series

WATER SAFETY WEBINARS A 4-PART SERIES

MARCH 3



Getting to Know Families United to Prevent Drowning

APRIL 9



Ready, Set, Prevent: Planning for the 2026 Water Safety Season

MAY 12



Open Water Safety 101: Life Jackets, Boating and Risk Reduction

SEPTEMBER 30



Partnering with Schools on Water Safety



American Red Cross



Evaluation QR Code

