

To Help Other People at All Times

Contents

To Help other People at All Times	9
Basic Swimming Skills	12
Why Drownings Occur	19
Recognizing a Victim	24
Planning a Rescue	28
Reaching Rescues	31
Throwing Rescues	33
Rowing Rescues	38
Swimming Rescues	42
Spinal Injury Management	75
First Aid for Water Rescue	79
Hazardous Water Conditions	85
Additional Opportunities	94
Lifesaving Resources	95

No Boy Scout will ignore a plea for help. However, your desire to help is of little use unless you know how to give the proper aid. The main purpose of the Lifesaving merit badge is to prepare you to assist those involved in water accidents. In an emergency, you will need basic knowledge of rescue techniques, the skills to perform them, and the judgment to know when and how to act.

You seldom will need the water-rescue skills you learn in Scouting. But it is possible that those skills will one day make all the difference, both to you and to someone else. Earning the Lifesaving merit badge allows you to confidently enjoy activities in and on the water; that is, to *be* prepared.

Each year, about 4,000 people drown in the United States. Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death (after auto crashes) for the Scouting age group. Also each year, the National Court of Honor recognizes about 100 Scouts and Scouters for saving the lives of those in danger of drowning. Undoubtedly, former Scouts aid dozens of others. The training you complete for the Lifesaving merit badge can indeed prepare you to save a life. Throughout this pamphlet, you will find true accounts of rescues by Scouts. (Look for the boxes with the Scout emblem.)

If you have earned the First Aid merit badge, then you already have some of the knowledge and skills necessary to help a person in trouble in the water. You also should have begun to realize the importance of staying calm under stress. Action without thought is not only wasted, it can be dangerous. A life-or-death crisis is no time for confusion or misguided heroics. Rescues should be performed with little fanfare in the easiest and safest manner possible. Only in that way can you ensure the safety of both the victim and yourself.

Preparation and Practice

If you read this pamphlet carefully, you will learn what "easiest and safest" means. But reading is not enough. Skills are best learned from physical demonstration and practice. Your counselor will instruct you in the various skills before expecting you to meet the requirements. You can begin now to prepare for that instruction.

First, read the pamphlet so that you will know what is to be covered and why. That will help you gain the most from your time with the instructor. Second, begin to swim regularly until you can easily complete the required distance swim using proper strokes. For rescues, speed and stamina are sometimes needed. Good form aids both.

Once you start instruction, practice will be important. In fact, if you wish to maintain your lifesaving skills, you will need to practice and review throughout your life. Before practicing with a buddy, make sure you understand the correct method. Ask your counselor to repeat any demonstrations that were not clear. Go slowly and deliberately until the movement becomes natural. Only then should you work for speed.

Be realistic. Your buddy should not chase after you in the water or behave in any way that is unlike a real drowning person. But realism can be carried too far. Do not use the word "Help!" as a practice signal. Lifeguards have their ears tuned to this word and may give you their attention when it is needed elsewhere. Also, arrange a signal with your buddy that means "Let go; I need to catch my breath."

With practice, you can master the skills required for this merit badge. But keep in mind that you also are expected to understand when those skills are to be applied. Learning good judgment is up to you. Be alert to all that is said. Your instructor will not cover material that is unimportant. Lifesaving is a serious undertaking and must be treated accordingly.

Rescuer Safety

The safety of the rescuer is important in any emergency. In most emergency situations, you probably can minimize the risk and perform a successful rescue. Some people drown in futile attempts to save others, but these would-be rescuers are usually frantic friends and relatives whose swimming skills are little better than those of the person in distress. They lack basic lifesaving training and act inappropriately.

After you earn the Lifesaving merit badge, you should know when you can perform a safe rescue and when you cannot. Current records are free of Scouts sacrificing themselves needlessly during water rescues. Please keep that record clear. If called upon, uphold your promise to help others at all times, but do it well. Don't risk injury to yourself when a rescue appears futile. Go for help instead.

Topics to Be Covered

This pamphlet covers subjects in a specific order to help you understand and follow the material.

- Basic swimming skills are reviewed first because you need to be a good swimmer before you begin work on the Lifesaving merit badge.
- Common causes of water accidents are discussed next so you can get a feel for situations when help will be needed and perhaps stop them from happening in the first place. Knowing the factors that lead to drowning also will help you understand the need for each item in the Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat standards. These are the foundations for safe BSA swimming and boating activities-

- How to recognize those in trouble is next. It is not always obvious when someone is drowning.
- Once you recognize the need, you accept the responsibility to act only if you are the most qualified person present. If you are, you must decide whether to go for help or to plan a safe rescue. The action you take will depend on several factors:
 - *The type of victim.* Is he conscious or unconscious? How urgently does he need help?
 - *The distance from shore.* Is the victim close enough for a reaching or throwing rescue, or do you need to get closer by taking a boat or flotation aid to the victim?
 - *What rescue aids are available.*
 - *Any special circumstances.* Do cold water, swift current, or injuries to the victim need to be considered?

Depending on the answers to these questions, you will choose your rescue method and confidently act within your known capability. Carefully studying this pamphlet and practicing with your counselor will help you gain that confidence and knowledge.