



World Water Safety

## INTERNATIONAL LIFE SAVING FEDERATION

Gemeenteplein 26 – 3010 Leuven – Belgium  
Tel: (32.16) 89.60.60 – E-mail: [ils.hq@telenet.be](mailto:ils.hq@telenet.be) - Web: [www.ilsf.org](http://www.ilsf.org)

### LIFESAVING POSITION STATEMENT - LPS 12

## HAND SIGNALS FOR LIFEGUARDS

**NOTE:** This statement is intended for those lifesavers, acting in a professional or volunteer capacity, who are trained in the techniques of water rescue and resuscitation and who assume a duty to safeguard members of the public at aquatic sites. They may be called lifeguards, lifesavers or both. This statement is not directed at members of the public trained in water safety and rescue techniques, but without a duty to respond, who may also be known, in some areas of the world, as lifesavers.

The signals outlined in this position statement are recommended for beach, open water and pool lifeguards. There are four (4) primary hand signals that allow a lifeguard to communicate with other lifeguards in relation to a rescue situation, and four basic hand signals to indicate direction. ILS acknowledges that many lifeguard organisations have a wide variety of hand signals indicating various actions. It is not the intention of this statement that lifeguard organisations no longer train and demonstrate other hand signals. However, ILS believes that a number of core signals should be common across all lifeguard organisations to enable consistency and effective communication across all agencies and environments.

### BACKGROUND

Hand signals were developed by lifeguard organisations to enable effective communication between lifeguards where other communication devices were not available, most particularly when a lifeguard is performing a rescue without a radio communication device. The ability to communicate, particularly in a life-threatening situation, is considered an important skill.

Lifeguard training manuals from many national lifeguard training programs were reviewed. It was noted that a wide variety of hand signals are in use across different countries, different agencies and different environments. It was noted that within some agencies, the same hand signal could mean two different things depending on where and who delivered it. It was further noted that the hand signals in use by the various lifeguard organisations had been in use for many years and in some cases many decades. This history of application of recommendations to the issue at hand is the strongest evidence available.

In general hand signals were divided into the following general classifications:

1. Communication from the beach or pool deck to a lifeguard in the water,

2. Communication from the lifeguard in the water to lifeguards on the beach or pool deck

The hand signals could also be classified as follows:

1. Those relating to a search and/or rescue situation
2. Those providing direction to the lifeguard

The level of evidence from the literature research is low. There are no direct outcome data for lifeguards using hand signals when responding to victims. The level of evidence in literature is low and most frequently expert opinion. The recommendations that follow are based on consensus expert opinion of the ILS Rescue Committee.

## STATEMENT

1. The International Life Saving Federation recommends that a minimum standard set of hand signals be utilised by lifeguard agencies to allow for international consistency and to provide effective communication between lifeguards. These hand signals are set out in the attached poster.
2. These hand signals are recommended for beach, open water and pool lifeguards.
3. Lifeguard agencies should assess operational requirements and where necessary develop additional specific hand signals to meet that organisation's operational requirement. It is acknowledged that many agencies have been using hand signals for many years. However, wherever possible, lifeguard agencies should adopt the hand signals recommended by this statement for consistency.
4. Each signal, when given by a lifeguard, should be made distinctly, and repeated until acknowledged.
5. Signals given by a lifeguard in the water should be repeated by lifeguards on the beach or pool deck. This lets the lifeguard in the water know that the signal has been seen and understood. It is noted that some agencies have developed a separate hand signal to convey that a message has been understood.

## THE HAND SIGNALS

### Search and Rescue signals

Signal	Action	Meaning
	One arm waved to and fro above the head	The lifeguard in the water needs further assistance. This may be due to a badly panicky patient, multiple patients or an injury to the lifeguard sustained in the response. Backup by rescue craft or other swimmers is required immediately

 <p><b>2</b> Submerged patient missing</p>	<p>Both arms raised to form a cross above the head</p>	<p>This is the most serious signal of all. A swimmer is missing and presumed submerged. Other lifeguards on shore or the pool deck should immediately fix the position of the lifeguard and initiate an appropriate response.</p>
 <p><b>3</b> All clear/okay</p>	<p>Touch the middle of the head with the fingertips of one hand</p>	<p>The lifeguard is indicating that no help is required in performing the rescue and that the patient is stable. However, other lifeguards should continue to observe and monitor the situation as the situation can deteriorate</p>
 <p><b>4</b> Pick up patient</p>	<p>One arm waved in a circular manner above the head and the other arm held parallel to the water's edge and horizontal to the ground.</p>	<p>This signal indicates that swimmers are in need of rescue. Once the signal is acknowledged direct the lifeguard to the swimmers (see directional signals)</p>

### Directional signals

Signal	Action	Meaning
 <p data-bbox="236 792 528 864"><b>5</b> Proceed away from shore</p>	<p data-bbox="655 338 979 405">Two arms held vertically above the head</p>	<p data-bbox="1043 338 1390 539">The lifeguard in the water should move further out to sea or away from the pool deck from where the lifeguard giving the signal is standing</p>
 <p data-bbox="236 1368 544 1440"><b>6</b> Proceed towards shore</p>	<p data-bbox="655 898 963 965">One arm held vertically above the head</p>	<p data-bbox="1043 898 1390 1099">The lifeguard in the water should move towards the shore or closer to the pool deck towards where the lifeguard giving the signal is standing</p>
 <p data-bbox="331 1832 564 1868"><b>7</b> Proceed left</p>	<p data-bbox="655 1464 1007 1570">One arm held parallel to the ground and pointed in the required direction (left)</p>	<p data-bbox="1043 1464 1382 1570">The lifeguard in the water should move in the direction indicated (left)</p>

	<p>One arm held parallel to the ground and pointed in the required direction (right)</p>	<p>The lifeguard in the water should move in the direction indicated (right)</p>
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## REFERENCES

Various Lifesaving Organisation Training Manuals, including SLSA, RNLI, DLRG, USLA, SLSNZ, RLSSA, RLSSUK, Irish Water Safety, SLSGB

Approved by the ILS Board of Directors on 21 April 2012.



## International Lifeguard Signals

The signals shown below have been approved by International Life Saving as the signals that should be known and used by all lifeguards. However, it is understood that Federations may add additional signals deemed necessary for their circumstances.



**1** Assistance required



**2** Submerged patient missing



**3** All clear/okay



**4** Pick up patient



**5** Proceed away from shore



**6** Proceed towards shore



**7** Proceed left



**8** Proceed right

