



World Water Safety

INTERNATIONAL LIFE SAVING FEDERATION

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

MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENT - PS 13

AQUATIC DISASTERS

BACKGROUND

There have been many tragic aquatic disasters in world history. They include floods, cyclones, typhoons, hurricanes, shipwrecks, aircraft crashes, oil rig disasters and tsunamis. The largest global aquatic disaster of the past century is the December 2004 Indian Ocean Basin Tsunami. An estimated 280,000 people lost their lives. In the affected areas, economic life ground to a halt and businesses collapsed. Millions of people saw their families and communities torn apart. The trauma caused by this devastating catastrophe cannot be underestimated. (1)

Traditional aquatic life saving focuses on education, prevention and rescue in non-disaster situations. (2) In 2000, an estimated 409,272 people drowned globally, which makes drowning the second leading cause of unintentional injury death. (3) More than 90% of unintentional drowning occurred in low and middle income countries. (4) The important principles of education and prevention are the most powerful tools to save lives in non-disaster and disaster aquatic situations. (5)

International tragedy may benefit from international effort. That international effort may assist in planning and implementing preventative strategies, rescue strategies, health management and post event debriefing. (6) This effort may be achieved by collaboration focused on a specific area that matches the knowledge, skills, capacities and attitudes of aquatic life savers. The International Life Saving Federation (ILS) and member organisations serve as the global authority on drowning and water related injury prevention in disaster and non-disaster situations. (7)

The International Life Saving Federation (ILS) and some member organisations, in conjunction with other international partners and local resources, may assist with aquatic disaster prevention, rescue, health management and debriefing. The major focus of ILS and member organisations in aquatic disaster is prevention and education. The ILS and/or member organisations can not act as an immediate emergency response network. The ILS and/or member organisations can act as planning and implementation facilitators.

If a major aquatic disaster occurs within a country or in several countries, ILS or member organisations may ask if the affected national or local life saving organisation(s) needs or

wants assistance. If desired, ILS or member organisations may endeavour to participate or coordinate needed assistance through the collective human and material resources within ILS and/or member organisations.

STATEMENT

PREVENTION

- 1) Each ocean region of the world should have an effective tsunami, cyclone, typhoon and hurricane warning system.
- 2) Every citizen of the globe should have swimming and water safety awareness and education.
- 3) In areas where tsunamis, cyclones, typhoons and hurricanes, floods and other aquatic disasters are considered likely, aquatic disaster signals, evacuation plans, focused education and water rescue plans should be in place for sea level or affected areas.
- 4) Appropriate tanker, ferry and watercraft passenger and weight load limits should be encouraged and respected to prevent aquatic disasters.
- 5) Lifeboats, lifejackets, survival suits and other preventative strategies for watercraft, waterfront buildings, and structures should be established, and made part of the world water safety culture.
- 6) All areas of potential flooding should have flood disaster mitigation, preparation and action plans.

RESCUE

- 7) All waterfront communities should have trained water rescue response systems for in-shore and off-shore emergencies and disasters.
- 8) All areas of potential flooding should have trained flood rescue response systems for flood disasters.
- 9) All marine vehicles and marine transportation systems should have trained rescue response systems to reduce loss of life and property for marine vehicle and transportation disasters.
- 10) The ILS or member organisations may coordinate a consulting system for rescue plan management
- 11) The ILS and/or member organisations may participate or coordinate aquatic rescue and response teams with expertise in water rescue, triage, first aid, medical management of aquatic injury and crisis health management.

HEALTH MANAGEMENT

- 12) ILS and/or member organisations may participate or coordinate a multi-national medical management consultation service to nations and communities preparing and/or implementing emergency response to aquatic disasters

DEBRIEFING

- 13) ILS and/or member organisations may participate or coordinate a consultation service for planning and implementing de-briefing assessments of the disaster event and the response

REFERENCES

- 1) World Health Organisation –World Health Action in Relation to Crisis and Disaster, Oct 2005.
- 2) International Life Saving Federation – Water Safety Certification Guidelines, November 2000
- 3) World Health Organisation – Injury and Violence Prevention, Facts about Injuries – Drowning, E.F. van Beeck, C.M. Blanche, D. Szpilman, J.H. Model & J.J.L. Bierens
- 4) World Health Organisation – Bulletin of the WHO, Policy and Practice – A new definition of drowning: towards documentation and prevention of a global public health problem. November 2005 83 (11)
- 5) World Health Organisation - Emergency Preparedness and Response, South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami, List of Guidelines for Health Emergencies, Oct, 2005,
- 6) World Health Organisation – Emergency Preparedness and Response, South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami, Moving Beyond The Tsunami, The WHO Story, Sept, 2005
- 7) International Lifesaving Federation – The First 10 years 1994-2004, September 2004, Headquarters Gemeenteplein 26, 3010 Leuven, Belgium

Approved by the ILS Board of Directors on 20 September 2006.