

Personal Electronic Devices

Lifesaving Society Standard Approved by the Ontario Board of Directors, February 2026

Standard

Direct Supervision

Personal electronic devices should not be used by lifeguards while providing direct supervision of bathers.

Lifeguards assigned to active surveillance must maintain full visual and cognitive focus on their zone of responsibility and remain immediately prepared to recognize and respond to distress.

Non-Guarding/Secondary Duty Rotation

During designated non-guarding or administrative rotations, staff remain:

- On duty
- On premises
- Within call
- Immediately responsive to emergency activation

Personal devices use may be permitted only when:

- It is work-related and authorized by the operator, or
- It involves urgent personal matters, and
- It does not interfere with readiness to respond

Audio use (e.g., earbuds or headphones) and engagement in immersive content such as video streaming, gaming, or social media should not be permitted while on duty.

Facility operators must clearly define expectations for these rotations within internal policies.



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Definitions

Lifeguard: A person appointed by the owner/operator to maintain active surveillance of swimmers and supervise bather safety in a defined aquatic environment.

Direct Supervision: Continuous, active surveillance of bathers in a defined zone where immediate intervention may be required.

Non-Guarding/Secondary Duty Rotation: A period when a lifeguard is not actively scanning bathers but remains on duty and available for immediate emergency response or assigned operational tasks.

On Duty: Any period during which aquatic staff are scheduled and compensated to perform safety-related or operational responsibilities within the facility.

Personal Electronic Devices (PEDs): Devices designed for personal communication, entertainment, or audio/visual engagement, including but not limited to:

- Smartphones and cellular phones
- Smart watches and wearable technology
- Bluetooth or wired headphones/earbuds
- Tablets, laptops, or e-readers
- AI-enabled glasses or screen-based wearables

RID Factor (Recognition, Intrusion, Distraction): As outlined in the Lifesaving Society's *Alert: Lifeguarding in Action*, drowning under supervision commonly results from:

- **Recognition** - Failure to identify a swimmer in distress
- **Intrusion** - Interference from secondary tasks
- **Distraction** - Loss of surveillance focus

Personal electronic devices contribute directly to intrusion and distraction, increasing the likelihood of delayed recognition.

Rationale

To ensure lifeguards maintain continuous vigilance, readiness, and professional conduct during all periods of duty by minimizing distraction, intrusion, and divided attention caused by personal electronic devices, thereby reducing the risk of drowning and aquatic injury. Effective lifeguarding requires uninterrupted

vigilance. Even brief lapses in attention can delay recognition of subtle distress behaviours.

Coroner findings, industry reviews, and cognitive research consistently identify digital distraction as impairing situational awareness and response time. Research from other sectors, including workplace and transportation safety, demonstrates that task-switching and screen engagement reduce vigilance performance — a critical concern in aquatic supervision environments.

This standard reinforces:

- Public confidence
- Professional expectations
- Consistent enforcement across staff levels
- Alignment with other provincial and international lifesaving organizations

Implementation

Policy Development

- Incorporate this standard into operations manuals and staff handbooks
- Define expectations for non-guarding rotations
- Identify permitted and prohibited device use

Storage & Access

- Establish designated storage areas for personal devices
- Identify approved emergency-use areas if applicable
- Prohibit devices on lifeguard stands or at surveillance positions

Training & Education

Integrate distraction-prevention education into:

- National Lifeguard
- Bronze Cross
- Instructor and Trainer programs
- Staff in-service sessions

Training should explain why vigilance matters, not just prohibit device use.

Enforcement & Accountability

- Apply expectations consistently across aquatic staff and management
- Establish progressive discipline for violations



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- Investigate device-related negligence through formal review processes

Exclusions

- Operator-issued or facility-approved devices used strictly for operational purposes (e.g., radios, iPads for pool logs, chemistry records, or lesson documentation)
- Verified medical or accessibility devices (e.g., insulin pumps, glucose or cardiac monitors), subject to operator approval
- Wearable devices may be used only if communication and notification features are disabled (e.g., “airplane mode” or “theatre mode”).
- Music systems for instructional programming (e.g., Aquafit) must be managed through operator-authorized equipment and must not compromise supervision.

References

- 2025, *Guide to Ontario Public Pools Regulation* – Lifesaving Society
- 2007, *Breaks from Direct Supervision Standard: Direct Supervision and break period.*
- 2017, *Alert: Lifeguard in Action: RID Factor*

Disclaimer

Lifesaving Society Safety Standards are developed using Coroners’ recommendations, the latest evidence-based research, and reflect the aquatics industry’s best practices at the time the publication was approved. The purpose of these standards is to encourage swimming pool, waterpark and waterfront owners, managers, operators and regulators to adopt these standards, in order to prevent drownings in aquatic environments. Lifesaving Society Safety Standards do not replace or supersede local, provincial/ territorial legislation or regulations, but they are considered the standard to which aquatic facility operators should work towards, to enhance safety within their operations and to prevent drowning.