
NORMAL OPERATING PROCEDURES (NOP)

AND

EMERGENCY OPERATING PROCEDURES (EOP)



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Forward

This manual provides information and advice for those involved in the organisation of a long distance swimming event.

In all cases FINA Open Water Swimming Rules will apply.

The Amateur Swimming Association cannot accept responsibility for inaccuracies nor for any loss or negligence arising out of this guidance, although every care has been taken in its development.



PLANNING AN OPEN WATER SWIM EVENT

Normal Operating Procedure (NOP)

(To be read in conjunction with the attached check lists)

The organisation of an open water swim event is complex, time consuming and requires detailed organisation in order for it to be a success. This documentation provides a guide to assist organisers who are tasked with organising an open water or long distance swim event.

The organisation can be broken down into a team of officials, who are likely to include the following:

- **Event Organiser** – the person who has ultimate responsibility for the organisation of the team.
- **Event Administrator** – a person able to cope with the distribution of paperwork related to the event and who can step into the organisers role.
- **Course Organiser** – person delegated with the responsibility for the marking and measuring of the site and each course.

Other officials that should be appointed:

- **Race Judge** – refer to FINA definition
- **Safety Supervisor** – refer to FINA definition
- **Medical Officer** – refer to FINA definition
- **Finance Administrator** – a person to draw up and monitor a budget for the event
- **Race Recorder** – refer to FINA definition

These people form the core planning and event team. They hold responsibility for all aspects of the event, the results service, pre-event planning meetings, problem solving, assigning responsibilities, etc. It is recommended that planning should cover:-

- A meeting to discuss the event.
- Meeting(s) to ensure that all formal approvals are available: e.g. Police, St John's Ambulance, Local Authority Coastguards etc.
- Safety review
- Organisers briefing to ensure that all involved are aware of their responsibilities.
- Competitors briefing to cover safety and announce any alterations to the course or other relevant details.
- Officials briefing to ensure that all officials are up to date with the current status of the event and any safety issues.
- Media briefing to address the press, TV, local radio, etc.
- Post race meeting to confirm results, discuss procedures, event outcome, report preparation for the ASA.



Advance Preparation

Permissions (see check list)

In order to run an event effectively sufficient planning needs to be in place with entry forms being made available. The starting place for this is the Local Authorities, site and land owners (as applicable) and Local Emergency Services (including Hospitals).

All preliminary notification of the event should include:

- Proposed date of the event
- Proposed venue
- Safety considerations
- Proposed start, last and anticipated finish
- Outline proposal of course; and alternative venues
- Estimated number of competitors.

Course Planning (see check list)

One of the most important factors is course planning. There are a number of factors and guidelines that should be observed and all need careful consideration for safety and suitability.

Course Measurement and Marking (see check list)

It is important that the course is determined following local advice and historical data and measured well in advance. This is to ensure that changes to the course can be made should weather or sea/water conditions deteriorate. Consideration should be given to planning an alternative course that can be put into effect with the minimum of delay.

Entry Forms and Race Information (see check list)

Competitors, as well as officials and other interested bodies need to know information about the course. The information needs to be as accurate as possible at the time of printing and imparted on the entry form and /or information pack. The basic information should include:

- **When:** date, start and finish time, prize giving;
- **Where:** location, direction and maps;
- **Refreshment:** arrangements in place communicated to competitors prior to their arrival at the event;
- **How much:** entry fee;
- **Health and safety information:** special local conditions, water temperature, light conditions and anticipated water conditions;
- **Format:** pool, river, lake or open water swims, wave starts, age categories;
- **Result:** show, when, where;
- **Disclaimers:** place a disclaimer on the entry form;
- **Medical conditions:** this information should be clearly stated on the back of the race number and on the entry form and include age, medication and drugs prohibition.

Any alterations to the published information including safety issues need to be made available at either in the race information pack or displayed in a prominent position and included in the race briefing.



Race Organisation (see check list)

Registration

The registration procedure needs to be clearly explained to competitors before the event. An area should be made available for registration that can cope with a number of entries. There should be a clearly defined entrance and exit point with marshals to ensure no undue delay occurs.

It is standard for registration to:

- Check disclaimer is signed, to include medical information and ability to swim the distance;
- Check competitor against list of entrants to determine starters, etc;
- Issue race numbers;
- Check competitor information is correct.

The registration area is also a good place to have a race information board with race details and any last minute changes to the published programme.

Marshalling

Once the course is finalised, numbers of marshals, safety officials, and escort boats need to be identified and positioned, recruit sufficient marshals and escorts crews as soon as possible. Local swimming, canoe and rowing clubs are good sources of event marshals and escorts as well as local gyms, health clubs, scouts/guides, women's groups and Lions Clubs.

It is important you look after and identify marshals, who will then be willing to assist in the following years or for future events. This includes feeding them, donations to their clubs, etc.

Ensure marshals are of a calibre to carry out the function required. Brief them on their exact duties and responsibilities as far in advance of the event as possible and ensure each Marshal knows their exact location. This can be done with maps or by a site visit. Each Marshal should be given detailed race information, water data, details of emergency procedures, radio and contact numbers and the name of the safety officer (including call sign) and race judge. In longer events, refreshments should be supplied and/or relief marshals arranged.

It is vitally important that the organiser has made provision for non-attendance of marshals, particularly safety crews. A list of marshalling priorities should be produced and marshals re-assigned from lower priority points as required. Under no circumstances should marshals be asked to endanger themselves. ***Where you are reliant upon a separate organisation providing safety crews it is essential that they are briefed on your safety procedures and that the compatibility of the two disparate procedures is assessed.*** All marshals should be issued with safety equipment and clothing including weather protection and life jackets. (see BLDSA advice on Canoe Swimmer Escort and Boat Crews Advice)



The following events will require marshalling and the type of venue will dictate the duties required. These may include refreshments, car parking, registration, timing and results.

- **Open water swims:** safety crew, start/finish marshals, marshals to control spectators and others;
- **Pool swims:** courtesy marshal for competitors information, safety staff, starters, timing crew, lap counters, pool side staff;
- **Post race:** helpers are needed to clear up, take down signs, dismantle barriers, pick up litter, etc.

Race Briefing (see check list)

There should be a separate briefing for both competitors and marshals. The timing of the briefings needs to be clearly advertised beforehand. The competitors briefing should take place in an area that allows the expected number of competitors to gather and hear the information clearly. Any information updates can be passed on at the briefing.

Start and Finish

The start and finish need to be clearly defined. The start procedure should be known to all competitors and there should be an **emergency system to either stop the event or change the course.**

Timing and Results

A system needs to be in place that can cope with the demands of the race. Competitors need to be processed quickly and the results can be produced by hand. In large events with a more sophisticated system may need to be considered. If possible the system and marshals should have a trial run before the race to iron out any problems. Whatever timing system is used, it should produce a list of competitors on the race day and a further list of results to dispatch to all competitors.

Race Facilities

Consideration should be given to the following:

- Sufficient parking for competitors, spectators and officials, suitably sign posted;
- Toilet and wash/changing facilities (where these are not available at the venue competitors should be advised in advance);
- Baggage storage and secure areas;
- Refreshments and catering facilities for competitors, officials and spectators.



First Aid and Medical Cover

Medical Personnel: The recruitment of suitable medical personnel is vital. There are a number of organisations such as the St. John's Ambulance and the Red Cross. Before the event the organiser must ensure the availability of sufficient medical personnel and the local hospitals emergency department must be advised. This is compulsory for sea swims. There should be sufficient people to cope with a worst case scenario particularly if the event is a sea swim or cold water swim. It is recommended that a ratio of 1 first aid professional to every 80 competitors be maintained.

Siting of Medical Facilities: (see check list)

This is particularly important. They are most likely to be needed on open water swims at the race finish and at high risk points on the race route as well limited facilities on the escort boats. Consideration should also be given to providing a fast response boat with medical facilities. These points should be identified by a risk assessment carried out by the race organiser, sanctioning officer and appropriate medical personnel prior to the commencement of the race. All first aid should points should be able to communicate with the Emergency Services.

Drug Testing: ASA headquarters may notify the event organiser that a nominated Doctor will attend the race. If this happens, the organiser should provide personnel to assist. The organiser is to arrange an area where the Doctor can operate in relative seclusion.

Communications (see check list)

Setting up the System: A system can be technically advanced or a simple system but it does need to be tried out in advance of the race. The system needs to be able to:

- Contact the Race Organiser in case of problem, queries or emergencies during the race;
- Contact the on-site medical personnel;
- Contact external medical services quickly;
- Relay information to the commentary team;
- Contact the race referee.

One practical option is to hire a local Raynet Club (or similar) who will provide communication units, or to hire the units and allocate them to selected personnel. Any more than two or three units will become expensive.

An alternative is to use mobile phones as the majority of people have them these days. This is likely to be the least cost option if it is feasible, and a list of telephone numbers can be issued to all communication officers in advance, including the central information point **(you will need to check for mobile phone or radio black spots before the event)**.



Information

Information needs to be made available to all parties concerned. For large events, a good Public Address system can be hired and a race commentator briefed. This needs to be audible in as many areas as possible. Appeals and calls for particular personnel can be heard immediately.

Finance

Race Budget: A race organiser needs to prepare a race budget. Without this it is not possible to accurately chart and calculate income, expenditure, committed funds or the balance of the account at the end of the event. A race budget needs to be approved in advance by the appropriate officers and the financial responsibilities understood. Extra or unexpected costs might be incurred from spectator facilities needed, attendance by the Police, etc.

Entry Fees: The setting of an entry fee is a decision made by the race organiser. Discounted fees to ASA members should be included.

Insurance: It is a requirement of the ASA that insurance cover is taken out. Venues that carry their own insurance, such as leisure centres, may be able to be used instead if the level of cover is approved by the ASA.

Financial Security: It is important that the race is able to fulfil its financial obligations. Failure to meet these commitments reflects badly on the sport, the ASA and the race organisers.



EMERGENCY OPERATING PROCEDURES (EOP)

(see check list)

What do we do if something goes wrong?

Most events are carefully planned and well organised, but a few fail and some of these are due to unforeseen emergencies. The purpose of this section is to plan for these unforeseen events, to reduce their impact on the event, the participants and the reputation of the ASA.

Lack of Course Marshals: If an event is inadequately marshalled it is likely to fail in some aspects, for example in the provision of suitable escort craft. Marshals must always be alert and capable of the demands of the task.

Results: The preparation of results is important to competitors and can cause frustration at the event of an event. Preplanning and rehearsal can reduce the risk of this problem.

COURSE PREPARATION AND RISK ASSESSMENT

The organiser should make sure that the choice of water for an open swim is suitable for the purpose and that the competitors are not being placed in any danger due to the location or condition of the selected water.

There are a number of factors that need to be considered and documented before an area of open water is used for an event, dependant on whether a sea, lake or river swim is being considered.

- Access, condition and proximity of start and finish points
- Likely water temperature (**set event minimum temperature**)
- Currents or eddies
- Water quality
- Hidden, overhanging or underwater hazards
- Other water users
- Minimum depth of not less than 1 metre at any point, excluding start and finish
- Conditions underfoot at start and exit

The organisers should consult with regular users of the chosen water – fishermen, lifeguards, canoeists, recreational boaters, wind surfers, etc.

Access to the area is very important as this will not only determine how each event should take place but also, in the event of an emergency, how emergency services would gain access to the start and finish areas and to the course.



Course design should allow for minimal congestion at the race start.

The start and finish areas should be clearly defined. The start should be wide enough so the proposed number of competitors can make a safe start free from interference from others. The finish area should be marked so that there is no confusion as to the exactly when the course is completed.

The actual swim course should be marked with buoys that are clearly visible when in the water. Turn buoys should be at least 1 metre high in the water. All markers should be fixed so they will not move in prevailing water conditions or tide turns. A lead boat or canoe may be required for the leading swimmer. Swimmers must wear numbered, brightly coloured swim hats.

Safety Management

Safety craft and/or canoes must be provided. Personnel assigned to water safety should be to the ratio of 1 to 20 competitors. Emergency exit points should be marked for swimmers to leave the water.

Consider what is the safe number of swimmers to have in the water at any one time?

At no point should any competitor be more than 50 metres apart. In addition to canoes, motorised safety craft should be employed with full warning, first aid and warming facilities.

Even when the water temperature and air conditions are good it is advisable to have additional resources at the swim exit. Hypothermia can occur in relatively warm water, particularly to weaker swimmers. A cut off time for the swim should be agreed with the race official/referee prior to the event. If any competitor fails to complete the course by the cut off time they should be removed from the water. The cut off time will be dependant on water conditions, weather conditions, air temperature and the length of the swim.

Environmental Conditions

The **SAFETY OFFICER** will shorten or cancel the swim if the water temperature falls below 16C. Excessive water flow or wave conditions will also affect any decision as well as a deterioration of weather and light conditions. The temperature should be taken as specified in the ASA rules or as specified at the start. For all open water swims alternative plans should be made in case environmental factors make the swim unsafe forcing it to be cancelled or curtailed.

Water Quality

Water quality is of prime importance. The Environment Agency/National Rivers Authority/Coastguards should be contacted before the event for advice on the area of water to be used. Water testing should be arranged and the results displayed for competitors to view prior to entry to the water.



RACE JUDGE AND SAFETY OFFICER PRE EVENT CHECK LIST

Reference is made to the pre-event check lists that accompanies these procedures. However, in addition, it is recommended that the Race Judge and the Safety Officer have their own simplified version to facilitate rapid decision making as to whether an event should run be postponed, altered or cancelled.

- Has permission been obtained from the Local Authority, Water and Landowners?
- Have you informed, Local Authorities, Coastguard, Environmental Health, NRA local Hospital as appropriate?
- Have risk assessments been completed recorded and control measures implemented?
- Are medical response and other safety critical arrangements in place?
- Have Competitors and Safety Officials been briefed?
- Have communications been checked?
- Do you have sufficient marshals and safety boats?
- Have you checked the course arrangements?
- Can Emergency Services access the course?
- Domestic arrangements, catering, showers etc.
- Water quality
- Arrangements for shortening or stopping the event.
- Alternative course
- Water Temperature 16C minimum for the event to go ahead
- Administration - is it robust enough to run the event?

