

Open Water Club Sessions: Guidelines for Triathlon London Clubs

The information below is aimed at providing clubs with the necessary advice and information they need in order to fulfil their duty of care and have adequate safety measures in place when conducting open water swimming sessions for club members.

Should you have any further queries after reading this document, please contact your Regional Development Officer, Ebony Blake who will happily find out, clarify or answer your query (ebonyblake@britishtriathlon.org).

In many instances clubs have thought about the points mentioned below but have not actually documented their safety procedures, policies or practices anywhere. It is important to have things down on paper so that a Health & Safety audit trail can be sourced. Should the worst happen and an accident occur during one of your open water club sessions, it is very hard for British Triathlon to support you if there is no evidence of how your club has acted responsibly to ensure sessions are safe. Simply calling the session a non-club training event but only allowing club members to take part, or the club hiring a venue, still impacts/involves the club. It is therefore strongly recommended that the following procedures are followed in any case.

Risk Assessment

If your club is using a recognised open water swimming lake (as listed on the Training Venues page of Triathlon London's website), then a Risk Assessment will have been performed by the lake swimming operators. Ask them for a copy of this document.

The purpose of a Risk Assessment is to write down hazards that have the potential to cause harm and calculate the perceived likelihood of harm occurring: the risk. Hazards such as rocks on the water bed, obstructions and route visibility should all be considered. Measures to reduce the likelihood of risk and ultimately determine whether it is safe for a session to take place should then be listed. A Risk Assessment works on the principles of looking, evaluating, acting and reviewing. It is important to also carry out a day specific Risk Assessment (which will be based on the generic Risk Assessment completed) to consider what action will be taken with varying hazards such as water temperature, the weather and water levels/conditions. Best practice would be to log the conditions and measures taken to minimise extra, day specific risks in a designated book before the respective session takes place.

Using British Triathlon's Event Risk Assessment Form is probably a good idea. This can be downloaded from the Triathlon London or British Triathlon website.

Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) for Club Open Water Swims

Procedures for conducting an open water training session should be written down. These will act as guidelines for the person running the session. The measures outlined should be enforced at all sessions. Listed below are a few guidelines that your club may wish to adopt. It is important that the guidelines below are checked to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that everyone on the club committee agrees on the way club open water sessions are to be conducted. Further points may need to be added which are specific to your club.

Background Information:

- Description of venue;
- Nature of water – lake, river, sea, etc;
- Contact details for owner/operator;

- Average water temperatures for period of use;
- Water quality;
- Access arrangements for club;
- Access arrangements for emergency vehicles;
- Emergency Action Plan (if exists);
- Use by other activities.

The Club Open Water Session Rules:

- No entry into the water will be allowed until all safety arrangements are in place;
- All open water swims require wetsuits to be worn;
- Brightly coloured swim hats must be worn by swimmers;
- Minimum organisation requirements are that swimmers will be paired based upon speed and ability;
- Swimmers will use a defined course set by the session leader – using landmarks where buoys etc are not available;
- Swimmers are to swim parallel to the bank / shore;
- Safety cover will be provided at all sessions and this will not be below the required minimum standard identified in the venue risk assessment;
- Register to be taken before entry into the water and all swimmers will have provided their emergency contact details along with any medical issues to the session leader. This information will be recorded;
- Before every session a pre-swim briefing will be given. This will provide clear guidance on the session, the group structure, the course to be swum, and information on what to do when experiencing/getting into difficulty (roll on back, raise arm in air);
- Sessions will not enter into water space used by other Watersports users unless prior communication for the sole use of the space over an allocated amount of time has been agreed upon beforehand;
- The club has a site specific Emergency Action Plan and all relevant personnel will be aware of its content and have access to it;
- At each session a First Aid kit will be available;
- A safety officer will be appointed before each session. This person will be responsible for liaising with the venue operator / owner to ascertain water quality issues. The safety officer has the final decision on whether a session can proceed;
- Each session will have a leader who will make themselves known to all relevant personnel.

Session User Rules:

Before taking part in an open water training session swimmers must:

- Provide the session leader with information about any medical issues;
- Provide their contact details;
- Notify the session leader if they have never swum in open water before;
- Sign up to the club's safety code and rules for open water swimming;
- Swim within their own ability and when swimming in pairs/ groups they must NOT leave their partner(s) side;
- Be of a minimum age of 14 (as at 31st December in the current year);
- Shower after swimming, washing open wounds and ears, etc to reduce the risk of infection.

NB: If a swimmer develops flu like symptoms, make sure you get checked by a doctor and mention you have been open water swimming.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

Again, if your club is using a recognised open water swimming lake (as listed on the Training Venues page of Triathlon London's website), then an Emergency Action Plan will have been defined by the lake swimming operators. Ask them for a copy of this document.

The Emergency Action Plan will outline the process and procedures to go through in the event of an accident or potentially dangerous changes in circumstances. For example:

- What will occur / who is responsible for certain actions if one person is not accounted for out of those who went into the water;
- If a boat enters the swimming zone how will swimmers be notified / taken away from danger;
- If the weather becomes too dangerous to carry on (eg. Dense fog comes over, or an electrical storm starts) what will occur to bring to swimmers to safety;
- Who will carry out a rescue and how will the emergency services be notified / other swimmers led out of the water.

Review & Communicate Health & Safety Measures

It is important to keep the Risk Assessment, NOP and EAP up to date and to review any required changes needed as a result of recorded / reported incidents. The main focus of any changes made should be to ensure that sessions are conducted safely. Incidents in other parts of the country may highlight possible neglected areas of open water safety and therefore club personnel should stay vigilant to developments in the area.

The Health & Safety documentation specified should be made readily available to anyone who requests it. Best practice would be to communicate this information to club members in a manner deemed suitable, eg. Website, forum, member's pack.

If the site you use for open water swimming is used for other watersports activities it may be worthwhile asking for their health & safety documentation to ensure that no area has been overlooked.

Remember: accidents happen – make sure it not due to neglect for Health & Safety on the club's behalf and ensure our sport is as safe as possible!