

"THE PROMOTION OF A YEAR ROUND SWIMMING PROGRAM"

By

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The American Red Cross has been making Water Safety its business since 1914, when it started the pioneer national movement in this field. Since the beginning of this educational activity drownings in the United States have been reduced about 46% although the increase in the swimming public has been better than 400% along with a population increase of 12% the past ten years. However, the one dark spot in this otherwise hopeful picture is the number of people who annually lose their lives by drowning (some 7,000) and the thousands who manage to survive a terrifying experience of a near-water tragedy.

Within the past few years and with amazing rapidity, well regulated facilities have brought swimming into its own as America's number one recreation. Swimming is no longer that adventuresome pastime of small boys in the old swimming hole as nearly every community now has well equipped pools and beaches. The reason for this popular growth in healthful exercise is more and more Mother, Father, Sister, Brother and even Grandma have been learning to enjoy aquatic activity safely. In viewing these facts it is not surprising that the annual toll in water tragedies and the experiences of near-drownings have had no effect in putting a damper on the enthusiasm of literally millions of persons who take to the water annually.

The Red Cross Water Safety Service has grown from a membership of one in 1914 to about a million life savers now holding certificates. In addition, there are the countless thousands of beginners who have learned to swim through regular programs conducted by local Red Cross Chapters. Other great national organizations, such as the Scouts and the Y's closely cooperate with the Red Cross in promoting Aquatic Safety Education.

Let us consider briefly the manner of operation of Red Cross Water Safety Programs. The National Headquarters are in Washington, D.C. From there the 48 states are divided into three areas for the 3,700 chapters. The Eastern Area, with 24 states, operates from Washington. The Midwestern Area, with 17 states, has headquarters at St. Louis, Missouri, and the Pacific Area, with 7 states, operates from San Francisco. Within the Midwestern Area, of which Illinois is a part, there are 1,560 Red Cross Chapters and of that number about 565 have reported activity in promoting Water Safety Programs. The State of Illinois has 126 chapters of which 59 have reported as carrying Red Cross aquatic activity.

Under the Life Saving Program some 81,000 people have been trained in Illinois the past six years. A break-down of this number show 10,288 with Senior Life Saving Certificates. 12,165 Juniors, 35,255 Beginners, 20,252 Swimmers and 2,029 Examiners. However, under the broadened program of Life Saving and Water Life Saving and Water Safety Certificates since last September there are over 300, 200 Senior and 180 Junior Certificate holders in Illinois.

In order to keep abreast of the trends in increased facilities and to keep pace with the enormous increase in interest in swimming, the Red Cross last year released a 262 page textook on Life Saving and Water Safety. This year a 266 page textbook on Swimming and Diving has been introduced and received public acclaim. Naturally this new material has brought about the broadening of Red Cross aquatic activity to include definite teaching material for swimming courses and Life Saving and Water Safety Programs.

To further cut the drowning rate and to improve swimming standards, the Red Cross stresses skillful and intelligent participation in aquatics to escape the misery and sorrow that often characterizes ill-considered and unskilled performance. Water Safety education is that phase of education which has as its objective the prevention of accidents. In accomplishing this objective carefully