

SAFE, HEALTHY, SWIMMING POOLS-THE IMPACT OF WHO AND CEN STANDARDS

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Context

As healthy recreational physical activity becomes an ever-increasing feature of people's every day lives around the globe, what we do, how we do it and where we do it are continually re-evaluated. The effect of cheap air travel has made us a global society where holidays, business, retirement, sporting activity are occasions where we share the culture of other countries and locations. There are some holiday destinations that at certain times of the year seem to be subsumed by other foreign nations. This brings a familiarity and an expectation that certain basic standards will be provided, from roads that are safe to travel on, food that is safe to eat, to sanitation that meets hygiene needs. And people have a similar expectation about their recreational activity. If you are used to a safe swimming experience in your own country, then you anticipate and expect the same standard in a foreign country. At the same time our standards and expectations are driven higher and higher. What passed as acceptable yesterday is no longer acceptable to day. If a swimming pool was filled with dirty, unclear water and it was the only one around, people on holiday would probably have put up with it. Today we expect clear, sparkling attractive water free from unknown risks and hazards, and if we don't get it then we will vote with our feet, and take other precipitatory actions to resolve an unsatisfactory experience.

These are some of the reasons why authorities like the WHO and CEN have in recent years turned their attention to the safety of swimming pools. In the UK we already had quite high standards in place. The ISRM was in effect formed to bring about such a situation as long ago as 1921. Then in the 1980s the main authoritative safety body in the UK, the Health and Safety Executive, went further and working alongside the industry produced definitive guidance called *Safety in Swimming Pools*, now called *Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools*. It was much more *laissez-faire* in many other countries, particularly some of the more popular sunny, tourist destinations and in consequence accidents and incidents were inevitable. There have been more British people injured, drowned or made ill in foreign pools than in our own, and this started to affect both the insurance industry with excessive compensation claims, and the popularity of these resorts, as people turned away from places with poor reputations for safety and hygiene.

This was a global situation not unique to the UK, and recognised by the authorities in the WHO and CEN. Their solution was to produce guidance and standardisation that pools can adopt throughout the world to provide a unified standards of safety, ones that deal with all the major concerns that cause drowning and serious injury. Standards that ensure that even though the quality of swimming pool water may not be regulated, it will be maintained and operated to provide a healthy swimming experience, without risks from chemical pollution or potentially pathogenic bacteria.

After a number of years of study and consultation both WHO and CEN are at an advanced stage of publishing their findings and recommendations this presentation from the author who has contributed and participated in both programmes, on behalf of the UK, will inform delegates of the likely outcomes and more importantly what is expected of managers and providers of pools tomorrow.

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