

June 17, 2014

Re: Underwater Breath Holding Policy and Shallow Water Blackout

To our patrons at Los Baños pool,

The recent and tragic drowning of Nicholas Johnson, who was not only a local and talented aquatic athlete, but one of my aquatic lifeguard staff, has prompted a lot of local dialogue regarding underwater swimming and prolonged breath holding activities.

On Tuesday June 7, I was invited to join other local aquatic professionals for a shallow water blackout (SWB) symposium. This opportunity was made possible by the Santa Barbara High School Aquatic Booster Club and the Nick Johnson Memorial Fund. The purpose, to educate local aquatic professionals on the danger of shallow water blackout and prolonged breath holding.

I wanted to share with you the rationale for the recent restrictions on underwater swimming and breath holding when swimming at Los Baños pool.

- **Underwater swimming can be no longer than 15 meters from any pool wall** (distance is marked by the yellow color discs on the lane line and the red tile on the bottom of the pool)
- **Breath holding may not exceed 5 seconds**
- **Repetitive breath holding/bobbing is not permitted**

First and foremost, shallow water blackout is completely preventable, and can affect the physically fit swimmer or anyone breath-holding underwater. The key to prevention is providing education and helping swimmers understand the dangers of breath holding. To further understand the science and more of the rationale used to implement the recent restrictions for Los Baños pool, I encourage you to visit our website or two other online resources with valuable information on the subject:

- shallowwaterblackoutprevention.org
- redwoodsgroup.com

My challenge is providing for the safety of all swimmers and eliminating the “gray area” regarding what can and cannot be done during unstructured swim times at Los Baños. Unstructured swim programs include all aquatic programs that do not have additional staff resources and expert responders on site to provide additional supervision and rapid emergency care. These unstructured aquatic programs include, lap swim, recreational swim and the Los Baños-based programs of Santa Barbara City College and Santa Barbara Swim Club.

The recent underwater swim distances and length of time permitted for under-water breath holding provide lifeguards the best opportunity to identify underwater swimming and breath-holding activities as they are charged with having to see through the water column with all of the swimming

activities in our pool. Many times SWB goes unnoticed even when swimmers in the same pool pass by someone who they believe are performing a specific training exercise or think that the individual who is holding their breath has just started or that is just the norm.

Consistent with our longstanding scanning policy for City lifeguards, they are held to the 10:20 rule. That rule allows for a continuous 10 second scan for the entire pool surface (above and below the water line), followed by a 20 second activation of the Emergency Action Plan and response to the victim. Having the lifeguard keep track of the amount of time you engage in underwater breath holding with all of the other responsibilities they are assigned is just not possible; especially, if you were to go longer than the recently established 5 seconds. This time was determined to factor in the 10 second scan length and ensure that if in fact, there is an aquatic emergency that we are working with no more than a 15 second window.

I can appreciate that the recent underwater swimming distances and breath-holding times may alter how you recreate at Los Baños. I have heard from some of you that it impacts the relaxation and soothing benefit you gain from performing these activities; however, I ask you to look at all of the material and risk so you better understand the rationale behind the recently implemented restrictions.

Lifeguard staff will be working to remind, educate and warn swimmers as we move forward with implementation. However, lifeguard staff has been instructed that if they feel that a swimmer is underwater longer than the maximum window of 15 seconds they will initiate our Emergency Action Plan, which includes activating our audible alarm and proceed to dive in and preform an appropriate rescue.

If you would like to discuss further, I can be reached at rhanna@santabarbaraca.gov.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RHANNA', written in a cursive style.

Rich Hanna

Senior Recreation Supervisor
Aquatics, Sports and Tennis