

Open Water Chairs Peer-to-Peer Teleconference – Notes

The items posted in this section are notes from conversations that are not reviewed or approved by the attendees. The information in these notes is not intended to override guidelines, policies and procedures listed elsewhere in the LMSC Guide to Operations or elsewhere on usms.org or in the USMS rule book.

APRIL 19, 2016
5:30 – 6:40 pm

Facilitator: Sally Dillon
Content Expert: Bob Bruce, Open Water (OW) Committee Chair

Attendees: Paige Buehler (LMSC Development Committee Chair), Wayne Huebener (IA), Skip Thompson (MI), Rob Copeland (GA), Hanna Cohen (MN), Mike Jorautas (KY), Bob Singer (AD), Phyllis Quinn (PA), Typ Whinnery (OK), Denise Brown (OH), Mary Pohlman (OZ), Jeanne Ensign (MT), Melinda Grieg Walker (AK), and Mary Turner (SD)

Question: We want to sanction our local OW event with USMS. It attracts a lot of triathletes. Will it be possible to have both USA Triathlon swimmers and USMS Swimmers in the water at the same time?

Response: It is sad to say that we still do not have a functioning agreement with USAT to allow both in the water at the same time. It comes down to squabbling between the two insurers. Members of each organization must swim separately at separate times to use the same course. We do have a mutual agreement with USA Swimming. Possible solution: a swim in Oregon has gone to neutral insurance that covers both without using either USMS or USAT sanction. Look up online “event insurance”. A lot of swims did this when the insurance rates for USMS skyrocketed. In all cases the coverage was not quite as good as USMS.

Question: Regarding neutral insurance, what do you give up if you don't get a USMS sanction?

Response: There are others but two benefits are 1) The extensive safety planning that is provided has raised USMS OW to a level that is better than anyone else; 2) Promotional opportunities that USMS can provide.

Question: If an OW event is insured outside USMS, are there rules against posting it in the LMSC or beyond?

Response: This might eventually become a USMS BOD decision but now it is up to the LMSC to decide whether they publicize non-sanctioned local events. OREG and PNA both post info and links to non-sanctioned OW events, but the distinction must be made. It is up to the LMSC sanction chair to do this. Currently an event can be placed on the USMS calendar even if it is not sanctioned.

Question: Do USA-S and USMS dual sanctioned OW events require that swimmers cannot be in the water at the same time?

Answer: While this information is not in the OW rules, it is not true. Contact Anna Lea Matysek annalea@usms.org at the National Office and she can provide the information. Dual sanction with both groups of swimmers in the water at the same time was approved in 2014. Montana and PNA frequently hold dual-sanctioned OW swims. Obtaining USA-Swimming sanctions can be challenging in Bob's opinion; combining LSC and LMSC events is important in order to have more financially viable events. Appendix B in the USMS Rules only applies to pool dual sanctioning. The LD committee will work on getting documentation into the rule book to outline the agreement.

Question: What are the qualifications for the Independent Safety Monitor and exactly what does "independent" mean?

Answer: The Independent Safety Monitor is responsible for making the decision, if necessary, as to whether to cancel the event if adverse conditions might affect swimmer and/or volunteer safety. This person must be independent of the group organizing the event. This includes anyone associated with organizers of the event as well. Bob's example: for an OW race, he recruited an educator who ran a local swimming pool (not the one his club trains at) and who was knowledgeable about swimming and safety. She was a USMS member but also had experience in triathlons. She belonged to a different workout group. Consider someone from another event or club/workout group within your LMSC. Other good choices would be someone from the local fire department or the local kid's swim club. Event directors might offer to reciprocate with other area events.

It is important that the independent safety monitor not have ties to the event so they can make an independent decision regarding safety of the swimmers and volunteers, regardless of whether it agrees with the race personnel's opinion. Mandatory safety training for the Independent Safety Monitor is about a week away from being available. Bob explained that a 20-minute power point tutorial with voiceover and a short quiz will be required for all sanctions. OW Compliance Coordinator Bill Roach will administer it as a requirement during the sanction process. Those events already sanctioned will still be expected to complete the program.

Question: Is there an occasion when you don't need a referee?

Answer: No! Rule 303.8 states that "there shall be an event director, referee, and safety director. The position of the safety director shall not be combined with the duties of any other official or staff member." This leaves open the opportunity for the event director to act as the referee during the event, which is common for smaller events. They need to be identified as such so it is clear as to who is acting in the position of referee. There are no specific qualifications in the rules for the referee but the LD committee is working on adding this.

Question: I swam an event in Minnesota and was required to have my own escort. Why is that?

Answer: They are used for longer swims. For shorter swims or those on a triangular course, too many boats and kayaks can be a safety hazard or get in the way of the swimmers. Point to point swims require more support and longer swims often require individual escorts. There is a section in the rules about escorted swims (303.3); refer to that for more information. Individual escorts require enormous personnel resources. Other comments about escorts and safety personnel included:

- Look for waterfront certified guards to provide safety, rather than volunteers; if a safety crew works at the swim area they have been trained for the venue.
- Local ham radio club members volunteer to be stationed in every motorized boat.

Question: How many people drown in USMS OW events?

Answer: Bob – there have been some cardiac events, but no actual drownings in a USMS event for many years. In triathlons you have a wide mix of swimmers, many of whom are not as prepared to do the swim, counting on their wetsuits, not their skills. There are people who have not been diagnosed with cardiac issues but they have them. Safety personnel need to be watching for swimmers that are not making progress and/or stopping often. Water temperature can effect swimmer safety.

New FNA ruling on water temperature and effect on USMS

Cold water shock can be life threatening. FINA has passed a rule that takes effect in September. Based on studies, FINA has determined the following standards for elite and Masters swimmers in FINA events:

No swims allowed if temperature is under 16 degrees Celsius (60 Fahrenheit)

16-18 degrees C (62-64 F) wetsuits required

18-20 degrees C (64-68 F) wetsuits optional

20 C and over (68 F) no wetsuits

Guidelines on where to take the temperature are included.

As a national governing body, USMS makes its own rules. USMS will need to make a decision as to whether to follow this policy and the USMS Board of Directors has proposed this to the LD Committee. There should be a lively debate at convention in the fall. Audience feedback indicated that, at least on the west coast, many events popular events will be cancelled as a number of them are held in water less than 60 degrees.

- The 40-year-old Santa Cruz swim in northern California attracts hundreds of swimmers each year and wetsuits typically aren't worn in the 58-degree ocean.

- Two swims in the Puget Sound (WA) require wetsuits but the water temp is always in the mid to upper 50's.

- The 32-mile marathon swim in Lake George (64-68-degree range) would lose most, if not all of their competitors if wetsuits were required.

- USMS needs to be flexible enough to accommodate different types of swims; adults should be allowed to make their own decisions.

Bob noted that the USMS Long Distance Committee did not address water temperatures until guidelines were considered for the USMS Rules in 2012. Prior to that, LMSCs were allowed to sanction OW swims using their own judgment regarding water temperatures in their jurisdiction.

Final Question: What are the current sanction charges, surcharges, and rebates?

Answer: There is no longer an insurance surcharge. The sanction fees are a flat \$100 per event plus \$5/swimmer entered; not to exceed \$1000. Rebates are still available; similar to the previous program. Pool swims also have sanction fees now and are also eligible for the rebates.