

2019 U.S. Masters Swimming Annual Meeting — St. Louis, Missouri

Committee Name:	Open Water Committee	Session #:	1
Committee Chair:	Bob Bruce	Vice Chair:	Karen LeFebre
Minutes recorded by:	Bob Bruce	Date/time of meeting:	Thursday, 9/12/2019, 11:30am

Actions Requiring Approval by the HOD:

1. None

Motions Passed:

1. None

Number of committee members present: 9	Absent: 9	Number of other delegates present: 68
Committee members present (list all, including chair and vice chair): Bob Bruce, Chair; Karen LeFebre, Vice Chair; Becky Cleavenger; Kim Elsbach; Eric Hektner; Jenny Hodges; Mark Johnston; Bob Kowlonkowski; Peter Lee. Ex Officio Members: Jay Eckert; Ali Hall; Dave Miner, Donn Livoni		
Committee Members Absent:		

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 11:30am

1. Opening: Bob Bruce, Chair
 - a) Welcome
 - b) Attendance
 - c) Introduction of OWC and VIPs
2. Review of 2019-2019 Subcommittee work: Karen Lefebre, Vice Chair
 - a) Development & Promotion – Bob B., in Will’s absence
SUMMARY: To whom do we promote and by what means? I recommend we communicate and promote to OW LMSC Chairs using the existing Forum until USMS offers an alternative communication tool. I recognize this should be a standard solution for all other OW subcommittees.
 - We succeeded in promoting the value of OW practices to the OW Committee. To begin to grow participation in OW events we need to grow organized participation in OW swimming through our clubs. USMS must lead this effort to make OW swimming safe and accessible for all swimmers.
 - USMS Club Finder database shows only 10 clubs which offer open water swimming. Imagine if we only had 10 clubs offering pool swimming. I believe that the real number is significantly higher if we included informal non-reported swims; it must be much greater given we currently sanction more than 50 open water events (again consider the number of USMS pool practices to the number of pool events). I believe the way to grow open water events is to grow open water practices.
 - To promote growth of open water practices, we need to communicate to the clubs through the LMSC’s using USMS established structure. Nearly 50 years of experience in pool swimming shows that this works.
 - b) Rules, Legislation, & Open Water Guide to Operations – Bob B.
Legislation: In deference to the work of the Open Water Task Force, the OWC did not consider any legislation proposals (part 2, 4, 5, 6 in the rulebook). The OWC may need to consider some next year if the OWTF recommends them as part of the overall effort to grow USMS open water swimming.
Rules: After several busy years of moving part 3 rules proposals, this was a quiet year. As with legislation, the OWC may need to consider more next year in conjunction with OWTF recommendations.
Open Water Guide to Operations (the USMS OW policy manual): Work this year has focused on making this set of documents better organized, more streamlined, and easier to read and understand. Our major work this fall is a complete this revised document to be ready for the 2020 open water season.

- Access on the USMS website: Finding open water information on the USMS website is a challenge! We are working with the National Office to figure out the best ways to make open water information intuitively accessible on the website.
- Outline: We have drafted a revised outline for all open water information that is more complete than the current outline.
- OWGTO documents: We will soon begin revising the current policy documents—compiled by many authors over many years, and now needing extensive review and editing—under the guidelines above. This will be our main task this fall.
- Best practices: During the OWGTO revision, we will add new content describing current best practices in hosting open water events.
- OW Practice guidelines: Working with the OWTF and working under our insurance parameters, we will include policy guidelines and best practices for hosting open water practices

c) Safety Education – Bob K.

Purpose: To review any new or ongoing business to the OWC relating to safety, and to review the documents and process of safety planning with the Open Water Safety Advisor.

Notes:

- There is a need for professional lifeguards instead of untrained volunteer kayakers to ensure safety
- An experienced lifeguard is needed at all finish lines
- It seems that often volunteers are not trained on victim or distressed swimmer identification
- Our committee created a best management practices using Safety Tow Buoys (STBs) during open water events; several event directors were interviewed

The following people were interviewed to gain a better understanding of event needs in the realm of safety and the use of safety tow buoys:

- Cary Epstein, coordinator of the www.epicenterrescue.com. He coordinates professional lifeguard services, which includes several major swims in the metropolitan area, including the NYC Triathlon and Swim Across America (which required safety tow buoys in the longer swims).
- Capri Djatasmoro co-chair of www.cibbows.com. Her organization sponsors several popular open water swims in the metropolitan area. She receives assistance from the New York City Harbor Patrol, volunteer kayakers and “swim angels” who swim alongside weak or disabled swimmers.
- Jaimie Monaghan, (www.jaimiemonahan.com) a world class long distance/ cold water swimmer and her take on STBs. She mentioned that many countries require STB’s in their open water swims and that she got tangled with another swimmer at a turn buoy at a swim in China.
- Awaiting interview with Dave Bara from www.nyopenwater.org. Dave is involved with open water swims in the New York metropolitan areas. New York State Parks require that swimmers in the Terry Laughlin Swim wear Safety Tow Buoys.
- The OWGTO_safety.pdf (was revised in 2016) to include reference to the USMS independent safety monitor, USMS-certified Open Water Referee, and safety tow buoys.

Presentation on Best Practices for Safety Float Buoys – Kim Elsbach (attached at end of minutes)

d) Event Management – Karen

Karen spoke about the draft of the Event Management Training, now in its third draft. The OWC hopes that it will be ready for the 2020 season

e) Officials – Bob B.

We are working on several topics this year:

- Certification: In the past three years, we have developed certification training and testing for OW safety directors and referees. We are now reviewing these trainings and addressing the process of recertification (which our OW officials must do every three years and which is new to us).
- Defining the roles of OW officials: We are preparing a draft document to define the roles of all USMS OW officials, using the USA-Swimming model (so that dual-sanctioned events can run smoothly) but drastically simplifying it for flexibility at local events.
- Defining the differences between USMS & USA-Swimming rules: We have prepared the first draft document comparing these rules (much like the comparison document for pool meets, found in Appendix B in the rulebook). This document is fairly complicated because
- Coordination with Officials Committee: Since we share some common concerns with the Officials Committee, we will be meeting with them at this Convention working towards a common goals where possible.

f) Awards – Jenny Hodges

Jenny reported that the Awards Subcommittee received three strong nominations for the Open Water Service Award and that they choose the best one. She reminded the crowd where the nomination forms could be found and invited folks to submit nominations next year by the deadline.

g) Open Water Swim Training – Mark Johnston

Purpose: *“To develop guidelines and materials for coaches to prepare swimmers for open water swims.”*

Overlap: There was a consensus within our sub-committee that there is a significant amount of overlap between committees and task-forces in the development of open water “coaching,” so rather than duplicate efforts, we are in the position to assist those other groups as needed. (Open Water Task Force, Long Distance Committee, Coaches Committee, and the NO).

USMS Website: We all believe that the USMS website should have an open water specific landing page where resources could be categorized, listed, and linked.

Online Training Resources: We are investigating several online training platforms.

- [Swim Smooth](#)
- [Total Immersion](#)
- [Tri Swim Coach](#)
- [WOWSA Coaches Education](#) leveraging the [ASCA Open Water Certification](#)
- [My Swim Pro](#)
- [Tower 26](#)
- [Ocean Walker](#)
- [Tri Swim Coach](#)
- [Swim Share](#) (Club Assistant)
- [Embrace Open Water](#)
- [Swim.com](#) (part of Swimoutlet.com)

After an initial investigation, our sub-committee developed a list of “review” criteria, and we put together a shared Google Doc. Each committee member was assigned several providers and during the beginning of the summer, we reviewed and updated the providers. However, In June, the National Office requested that we cease our activity due to the impending arrangement with Swim.com.

3. Open discussion: Development & promotion of open water events for 2020, particularly referring to the work of the Open Water Strategic Task Force – Bob
Due to time constraints, this discussion was short

4. Closing - Bob

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35pm

Tasks for the Upcoming Year

1. Continue the ongoing work of the Committee

Best Practices for Using *Safety Tow Buoys* (STB's) in Open Water Masters Swimming Races*

Submitted by Kim Elsbach, OW Committee, USMS. September, 2019

* Best practices are based on interviews with 3 open water race directors who have used STBs in both ocean and lake open water races during 2019.

Important: Unless otherwise noted, these “Best Practices” are *suggested guidelines*. They are not formal rules. They are meant to aid Masters Swimming race directors who wish to use STBs as an optional or required safety measure during open water swimming races.

I. Definitions

A. Safety Tow Buoys (STBs) are defined as inflatable buoys tethered to the waist of the swimmer. STBs should be able to support the swimmers’ weight (i.e., keep the swimmer afloat) in the water and come with an adjustable tether. The dimensions of STBs should be no wider than the swimmers’ legs when held together, and should extend no lower than mid-calf when the swimmer is standing and the buoy is tether to the waist.

II. Advantages and Disadvantages of Using STBs in Open Water Swimming Races

A. Advantages

- 1. Aiding Swimmers in Distress.* Swimmers may hold on to the buoy if they are in distress. The STB will hold a distressed swimmer afloat until safety personnel can arrive. In this way, STBs function like a personal life preserver.
- 2. Visibility to Safety and Rescue Personnel.* STBs make it easy for safety personnel to track swimmers in the water and identify swimmers in distress (e.g., a stationary buoy is a signal that a swimmer is in distress). Even if a swimmer is submerged below the surface of the water, the safety buoy will be floating and visible to rescue personnel, making it possible for a rescue attempt.
- 3. Aiding in Recovery of Bodies.* In rare cases where swimmers are not reached in time for a rescue attempt, STBs will make it possible to retrieve a swimmers’ body quickly.

B. Disadvantages

- 1. Potential Interference with/by Other Swimmers.* If the tethers on STBs are too long, it is possible for them to become entangled across swimmers. Keeping the tether short enough that the buoy does not extend past mid-calf when the swimmer is standing on land prevents this from happening. None of the race directors interviewed for this document reported any cases of STBs entangling in their races. Another possible type of interference may come from other swimmers grabbing or pulling on a tether. Like pulling on a wetsuit leash or any part of another swimmers’ apparel, such actions are prohibited during races by Masters Swimming rules and should be reviewed by race directors in printed and stated instructors prior to a race.
- 2. Issues in High Wind/Surf.* In cases of high winds, especially tail winds, a swimmers’ STB may be blown forward so that it interferes with their arm strokes. In addition, high winds and surf may cause a STB to become detached from its tether. In these cases, race directors should use discretion in deciding if conditions are too dangerous for the swim, or make sure swimmers using STBs are aware of the potential for interference/detachment during the race.

3. *Potential for Unfair Advantage.* According to *USMS Rule 303.8.5* a swimmer may hold on to a STB to rest if they are not making forward progress. If a swimmer holds onto a STB and makes forward progress (e.g., in a down-river swim), this would constitute an unfair advantage and would disqualify the swimmer, *unless the race-director explicitly opts out of that rule.* A race director should make clear in written and pre-race directions if he/she is adhering to USMS Rule 303.8.5, and the consequences of that violating that rule if he/she is adhering to it.

4. *Potential for Drag.* Although STBs create a minimal amount of drag on swimmers, none interviewed for this document reported any significant drag from using one.

III. Selection and Supply of Safety Tow Buoys for Open Water Swimming Races

A. Color. It is recommended that STB's be a different color than turn buoys. It is also recommended that STBs be highly visible to boaters, other swimmers, and safety personnel. Boaters agree that orange and pink are the most highly visible colors. Green is NOT recommended, as it tends to blend in with water color.

B. Size (see point I.A. above)

C. Brand. There are many different brands of STBs on the market, but most are similar in size, shape, adjustability and cost. Some common brands include: SaferSwimmer, Zone3, ESONE, New Wave, Speed Hound, IDRYBAG, ProCase, and AirRunTech. All cost around \$20-25 USD.

D. Supply of STBs. Race directors may either require all swimmers to bring their own, conforming STBs to a race, or may supply them for all swimmers. If STBs are supplied by the race director, they should be numbered and checked out/returned in the same manner as are timing chips. If STBs are not supplied by the race director, it may be advisable to have some STBs on hand to sell.

IV. Pre-race Guidelines

A. Race Check-in Procedures. During check-in for races that require STBs and swimmers have brought their own, swimmers must demonstrate to check-in personnel that their STB is airtight, is securely attached to their waist, and that the tether is adjusted to the appropriate length (see point I.A. above). If the STB does not meet these designations, the swimmer should not be checked in (unless the STB is made compliant or replaced by a compliant STB). In races where STBs are optional but not required, a swimmer with a non-conforming STBs should not be allowed to use it in the race (unless it is made compliant or replaced by a compliant STB).

B. Pre-Race Directions for Swimmers. In pre-race meetings, all swimmers should be made aware of rules regarding no pulling on or grabbing of other swimmers' buoys, and rules regarding no forward progress when holding on to buoy (unless race director opts out of this rule). Buoy tether length and inflation should be checked again. Finally, directions should be given about what to do if buoys become detached during the race. It is suggested that race directors treat detached buoys like lost swim caps and ask that swimmers continue without them at their own discretion.

V. During-race Guidelines

A. Starts. STBs may be used in water or beach starts. Both have been done with no problems. No problems have been found when including those with and without STBs in the same wave, but race directors may choose to include those with STBs in a separate wave (e.g., like a "wet suit" wave).

B. Drafting and Passing. Drafting is possible in swims with STBs as long as tethers are of the required length. Passing is not a problem unless there are high winds, which may move STBs to the side of swimmer. In these cases, a wider passing lane is recommended.

B. Finish. No special directions are needed for swimmers exiting the water with STBs as long as tethers are of the required length.

VI. Other Considerations

A. STBs not allowed in USA Swimming Races. USA Swimming has no provision for using STBs in their events, so such use is illegal. If Master Swimming races are co-hosted with USA Swimming Races, separate waves should be used so that race directors can ensure that STBs are not used in the USA Swimming waves.