



PUBLIC SAFETY & AQUATIC RESCUE TRAINING MANUAL

35th EDITION





Module 2: Safety and wellbeing

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Safety and wellbeing

Your surf lifesaving club (or lifeguard base), the beach and the aquatic environment are seen as your workplace. As such, all SLS members have a shared duty of care under Australia's Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislation to ensure the health and safety of themselves and others, as is reasonably practicable.

Types of safety signs

Danger signs

Danger signs are used where conditions are likely to be life-threatening. The word 'Danger' appears inside a red oval inside a black rectangle.



Warning signs

Warning signs are to be used where conditions are hazardous yet not likely to be life-threatening. The black hazard symbol appears within a triangle on a yellow background. Black wording may also appear if necessary.



Emergency signs

Emergency signs indicate the location of emergency-related facilities such as first aid kits, emergency exits and safety equipment. They comprise a white symbol and/or text on a green rectangle with white enclosure.



Fire signs

Fire signs advise the location of fire alarms and firefighting equipment. They contain a white symbol and/or text on a red background.



Mandatory signs

Mandatory signs usually contain the word 'MUST' and indicate an instruction that must be carried out. These signs appear as a blue circle containing a white symbol and may also present black wording on a white background.



Prohibition signs

Prohibition signs specify actions or behaviours that are not permitted. A red annulus and a slash symbol are shown over the action symbol on a white background. The sign may also show black wording on a white background.



General information

General information signage communicates information of a general nature and often refers to housekeeping, company requirements and logistics. They are made due to popular demand even though they are not referenced in the Australian Standard.



Table 1 - Types of safety signs

As part of SLSA's commitment to health and safety, this manual outlines some of the safety responsibilities involved in surf lifesaving and what can be done to minimise the risk of injury or illness in the surf lifesaving work environment.

Safety induction

You must participate in an induction as part of your safety awareness training and as per your surf lifesaving club or service's work health and safety management plan. This should be done before participating in any SLS activities. Your induction should cover all the points listed on the [SLSA Club Member Induction Checklist](#).

Safety signage

The [Australian Standard 1319-1994 Safety signs for the occupational environment](#) specifies several signs that relate to safety. Look for these signs in and around your surf lifesaving club. Read and understand their safety messages before taking appropriate action.

Work health and safety

There are many forms of WHS legislation with supporting documents relevant to WHS in surf lifesaving clubs. Both state/territory and federal legislation cover WHS matters. SLSA is guided by the following in establishing its WHS related policies and guidelines:

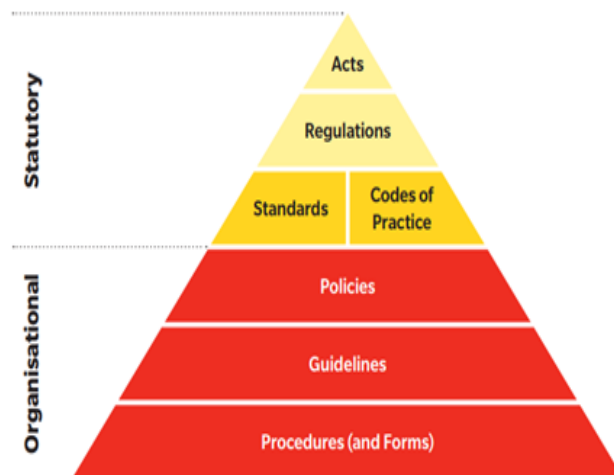


Diagram 1 – The hierarchy of legislation

- Acts—statutes or laws passed by both houses of an Australian or state parliament where appropriate.
- Regulations—rules that specify in great detail how to comply with an Act. Regulations are legally binding documents.
- Standards—authoritative guides to best practice; in some cases, they are legally binding when incorporated into legislation.
- Codes of practice—practical guidance about one or more ways of achieving legal requirements under the WHS Act and regulations. They are also the minimum standards of WHS that should be complied with in a workplace.
- Policies—official documents adopted by SLSA and its entities that outline the rules that must be followed within a specific area of the organisation.
- Guidelines—streamline certain processes according to what is best practice when specific policies or standards do not apply.
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs)—step-by-step instructions on how to complete tasks to enact policies, standards and guidelines. These are what you will see and follow in your day-to-day operations at your surf lifesaving club.

Copies of SLS policies, guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) are available to access via the [SLS Members Area Document Library](#). You should familiarise yourself with them. Follow these as well as monitor the [SLS Members Area News and Events](#) web page for any updates made to policies before June each year.

Work Health and Safety Act 2011

The [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(WHS Act 2011\)](#) law requires that organisations protect the health, safety and welfare of all workers (including volunteers) and other people in the workplace. It defines health to mean both physical and psychological health. The WHS Act 2011 also requires that all people are protected from hazards arising from work, so much as is reasonably practicable. [State and territory WHS regulators](#) can impose penalties when organisations or individuals do not comply with this law.

Duty of care



Australian WHS legislation requires organisations such as SLSA and its entities to offer a duty of care to ensure, so much as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of people who carry out activities in the workplace.

‘A volunteer officer’ (someone who makes, or participates in making, decisions that affect the whole, or a substantial part, of the organisation’s activities) generally cannot be prosecuted for failing to comply with their officer duties under the WHS Act 2011. A volunteer officer can, however, be prosecuted in their capacity as a volunteer worker just like any other worker if they fail to take reasonable care regarding their health and safety or that of others.

Some incidents should be immediately notified to your state/territory WHS regulator. In some instances, an incident or injury scene may need to be preserved as per your local SOPs. Your designated club safety officer will facilitate this.

Duty to rescue



Where a lifesaving or lifeguarding service is provided, team members on duty have a certain level of responsibility to beachgoers. While lifesavers and lifeguards do not have an automatic duty to rescue someone, there are some guiding principles that need to be taken into consideration at the time of any incident(s).

- Are you putting yourself in unnecessary danger?
- Do you have the skills to perform the rescue?
- Do you have the equipment you need?
- Is the person(s) asking for help?
- Is it foreseeable that the person(s) will need help?
- Is it reasonable to render assistance?

If you are off duty, you have no legal duty of care to stop and render assistance to any person requiring assistance. If you do, the 'Good Samaritan' laws in your state should offer some protection. Nearly all Australian states and territories have in place Good Samaritan legislation to ensure that people who step forward to provide emergency medical assistance are not held legally liable for their actions provided they act in good faith.

Whether you are on or off duty, you should take care to do only what is within the limits of your ability and training.

WHS responsibilities

All SLS members have a shared duty of care under Australia's WHS legislation to ensure the health and safety of themselves and others within their surf lifesaving clubs, so much as is reasonably practicable.

Responsibilities of all SLS entities

- Establish and monitor risk management procedures.
- Consult widely on WHS issues and resolve them promptly.
- Investigate surf lifesaving incidents and accidents.
- Implement and maintain the injury reporting system and strategies.
- Maintain a safe work environment with clear safety rules and updates.
- Promote a culture of safety and wellbeing.
- Provide safety training and education.
- Provide access to safety equipment necessary to perform specific activities.
- Support the development of systems for managing critical incidents and stress.
- Support rehabilitation and return-to-duty procedures for injured members.

Refer to the [SLSA Club Responsibility Matrix](#) for more information on the responsibilities of various roles within a surf lifesaving club.

Responsibility Matrix ⊙ = Awareness ✓ = Responsible	Club Executive (President, Treasurer, Secretary, Registrar, etc)	Surf Club Safety Officer	Club Captain	Patrol Captains	Chief Training Officer	First Aid Officer	Competition Captain and Coaches	IRB, Surf Boat, Ski Captains	Gear Steward or Manager	Junior Activities Supervisor	Age Managers	All Members	Parents of Junior Members
Member Injury Reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hazard Identification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Health and Safety Training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊙	✓	✓	⊙	⊙
Equipment Storage Effectively	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊙	⊙
Return to Surf Duties Management of injured members	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊙	⊙	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙
Club Member Induction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	✓	✓	⊙	⊙
Maintenance, safety and security of Club Premises	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙	✓	✓	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙
Health and Safety Audit of Premises	✓	✓	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	✓	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙

Table 2 – Club responsibility matrix

Responsibilities of all SLS members

- Act responsibly within your limits and with care for yourself and others while promoting a culture of safety and wellbeing.
- Comply with SLS policies at all levels of the organisation.
- Control and provide feedback on hazards identified.
- Follow safety guidelines, SOPs and the safety directions of your patrol captain or club officers.
- Report any injury, illness, near-miss incident or faulty equipment as soon as possible to your patrol captain or relevant club officer.
- Stay informed and up to date with changes within the SLS organisation that impact on your role as a lifesaver.
- Use all equipment safely, correctly and for the job for which it is intended.

SLS members must also participate in annual skills maintenance sessions before 31 December each year (or 31 July in the Northern Territory) to develop and maintain their own expertise, demonstrate they are fit to save a life and maintain SLS award proficiency.

Environmental management and sustainability

The beach and aquatic environment are also considered part of a lifesaver's work environment. Currently Australia's coastal environment is experiencing the impacts of climate change, such as heatwaves, sand erosion and inundation from extreme weather conditions. It is also impacted by an increasing number of pollutants making their way into the ocean. You can help ensure our coastal environment remains clean and safe for yourself, beachgoers and marine life by adapting to climate change and following the 5 Rs of sustainability: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose and Recycle. You should also dispose of your rubbish responsibly.



Hygiene

Personal hygiene



Personal hygiene is important to ensure the safety of yourself and others. Listed below are ways to make sure you meet the highest standards of personal hygiene.

- Always be clean and presentable, e.g., long hair tied back.
- Avoid contact with other people's body fluids, e.g., blood from a victim.
- Cover open cuts or wounds.
- Use single-use items when providing resuscitation or first aid if available, e.g., a resuscitation mask.
- Wash your hands regularly, especially before and after activities such as treating a victim, eating or handling garbage.

Environmental hygiene



Environmental hygiene is about keeping your workplace clean and tidy to avoid conditions that allow disease-causing bacteria and vermin to thrive. Everyone should:

- clean and maintain all work premises and equipment regularly
- control pests and vermin
- follow correct storage and waste removal procedures
- follow all workplace health and safety requirements, e.g., safe food and manual handling
- protect food and water from biological contamination
- use sharps containers for the disposal of needles and sharp objects.

Personal protective equipment



Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be used by SLS members to further reduce risk during SLS operational activities. Some common examples of PPE used in the SLS operating environment are [1]:

- helmets, which are required to be worn by all rescue water craft (RWC) operators and are optional and encouraged for IRB operators on lifesaving duties
- lifejackets (also known as a personal flotation device or PFD), which must be used by all powercraft operators and crew
- patrol uniforms
- single-use gloves and resuscitation masks
- sunglasses, sunscreen and hats
- wetsuits and long-sleeved shirts.

It is crucial that PPE meets industry standards to ensure the validity of its safety features.

Workplace injury and illness

Common causes of workplace injury and illness

Unsafe work conditions and practices can lead to injury, illness or even death. This is in addition to property, reputation or environmental damage.

Types of hazards

Type of hazard	Description	Example
Obvious	Hazards that are obvious to a reasonable person in the position of that person	Broken glass on the floor
Hidden	Hazards that are not obvious to a reasonable person in the position of that person	Communicable diseases
Developing	Hazards that are cumulative and present over a long period of time	Poorly stored fuel
Acute	Hazards that appear suddenly, have an obvious and severe immediate impact	Chemical spills
Chronic	Hazards that have a more hidden, cumulative and long-term impact	Poor manual handling, mental stress and sun exposure.

Table 3 -Types of hazards

More information about the different hazard categories and how to manage hazards is available in the *SLSA Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs* available in the [SLS Members Area Document Library](#).

Examples of hazards

The following are examples of common hazards that are a source of potential harm in a lifesaving environment:

Accidents

An accident is an unexpected event that results in or creates the possibility of an injury or damage to property. Both accidents and near-miss incidents give warning that there is something in a work process that needs to be investigated and possibly changed. Failure to do this may lead to the accident recurring or a more serious accident. All accidents and near-miss incidents should be taken into account and reported to the patrol captain and logged appropriately. Accidents outside duty hours using service equipment should also be recorded by an officer.

Fatigue

Fatigue is the state of extreme tiredness. It is a common contributing factor to workplace injuries and tends to be cumulative.

Many different physical and/or psychological conditions can cause fatigue, including poor work conditions, anxiety, depression and impaired sleep. Effective treatment for fatigue will depend on its cause. You can manage fatigue using various control measures such as developing healthy sleep habits, eating a healthy diet

and doing regular physical activity. Between six to eight hours of quality sleep is recommended in every 24-hour period.

Faulty equipment

Equipment needs to be well maintained so that it is not hazardous. Damaged rescue boards, broken propeller guards on inflatable rescue boat (IRB) motors and patrol enclosures in disrepair are all examples of hazards. All breakdowns or faulty equipment must be reported and then repaired by a qualified person prior to use.

Hazardous manual tasks

Many manual handling injuries that result from hazardous manual tasks are not caused by a single handling accident, but rather, they build up over a period of time. A hazardous manual task is any task that requires a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any person, animal or thing. Age, posture, level of fitness, body strength, medical history, workplace environment, poor ergonomic design, as well as one's attitude to self-safety are all factors that will contribute over time to a person's risk of injury (especially to their back, hands, arms and feet).

Incorrect storage of equipment

Lifesaving equipment, goods and fuel need to be stored correctly to prevent them from becoming a hazard as well as meeting some legislative requirements, e.g., *Australian Standard AS 1940:2017- The storage and handling of flammable and combustible liquids*. Follow your local SOPs, which may be accessed online via the SLS Members Area Document Library. Good judgement should be used when storing equipment, for example:

- fuel and hazardous substances should always be correctly labelled, stored securely away from children and in accordance with directions on the safety data sheet (SDS)
- heavy items should be stored on the bottom, lighter items on the top
- milk crates and boxes should not be used to support the weight of IRBs, or as shelves or ladders
- storage areas should have strong shelves suitable for the equipment that they are holding.

Incorrect use of rescue equipment

Rescue equipment and patrol items should be used only by SLS members and in designated areas. Training areas should be set up with adequate signage and in an area that will not cause harm to the public. SLS members learning new skills such as board paddling or IRB driving must be particularly careful. Wetsuit cords and long hair should be tucked away where possible to ensure that they do not get caught in any equipment.

Organic substances

Organic substances such as food, body fluid, microorganisms, toxins and viruses can present a threat to living organisms, such as humans. The use of PPE such as gloves, masks and safety glasses when providing first aid, resuscitation or preparing food assists in preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Any equipment that comes into contact with bodily fluids should be disposed of correctly (e.g., using sharps containers, hazardous waste bags) or washed and disinfected where appropriate. You should also maintain high levels of personal hygiene.

Obstructions

Obstructions can cause harm, with or without direct contact. For example, equipment piled in fire exits or in stairwells may cause a delay in your response to control a fire hazard.

Poor attitude

Actions taken as a result of an individual's poor attitude and decisions regarding their safety and that of their fellow SLS members is considered a behavioural hazard. You should always follow organisational policies and procedures as well as lead by example to promote a culture of safety first.

Spills and slippery surfaces

A spill such as water, food, oils or powercraft fuel on the floor can be hazardous. Rock surfaces and pool walkways may also be very slippery and hazardous, especially when a quick response is needed. Slips, trips and falls result in thousands of preventable injuries every year.

Surf environment

Working outdoors for long periods of time can subject you to long periods of sun exposure and extremes of temperature (hot or cold). The surf environment also creates a unique blend of hazards in the form of waves, shallow water and sandbanks, rocks, potholes, marine creatures, aquatic equipment, other surfers or swimmers and rip currents.



Dangerous marine creatures

Many interactions with dangerous marine creatures are sporadic and unpredictable, while others are regular threats that require constant risk management.

Tropical marine stingers

The tropical waters north of Bundaberg in Queensland and on through the Northern Territory to Exmouth in Western Australia are home to some of the world's most dangerous marine stingers. These include in particular the Irukandji and the box jellyfish, which have tentacles equipped with millions of nematocysts, or stinging cells, which have a tiny harpoon attached to a venom-filled bulb. These nematocysts are triggered when they come into contact with chemicals found on the skin. The venom injected negatively impacts a victim's heart, nervous system and skin cells.

Identification

Box jellyfish	Irukandji
The <i>Chironex fleckeri</i> species is a large but almost transparent box jellyfish, with a box-shaped bell up to 30 cm in diameter. They have up to 15 ribbon-like tentacles that arise from each of the bell's four corners (up to 60 tentacles in total). These may contract to about 10 cm or may extend up to 3 m in length.	The <i>Carukia barnesi</i> species is a small transparent box jellyfish, 1–2 cm in diameter, usually not seen. Some newly described species may be larger (up to 15 cm). They often have up to four thin ribbon-like tentacles that arise from each of the four corners.
	

Lifesavers may also inform the public that these box jellyfish are often not far from their food source such as sea lice felt in the water and clusters of salps, which look like crushed glass or ice at the high tide line. The stinger peak season is October to May.

Risk management

The following are examples of control measures that can be taken in order of effectiveness as per the hierarchy of controls:

- avoid the open ocean during peak stinger season
- discontinue beach activities (beach closure)
- use stinger resistant swimming enclosures (swimming nets)
- conduct stinger drags
- display signage
- wear PPE such as lycra or neoprene full body wetsuits, gloves and neoprene boots
- ensure the availability of vinegar on patrol and in first aid kits.

Swimming nets are used to protect the patrolled area in some tropical waters during the stinger peak season, and the water is constantly tested prior to the start and end of patrol by conducting 'stinger drags' to assess the presence of marine stingers.

Refer to your local SOPs for more information about managing marine stingers in tropical waters.



Actions in the event of a sting

Pain from a box jellyfish sting is almost immediate and there is a characteristic 'ladder pattern' on a stung area. Death from their sting can occur within 2–3 minutes. Severe generalised pain from an Irukandji sting may occur 5–40 minutes after a sting and you may see a faint red mark develop. Other signs and symptoms as well as treatment of marine envenomation are covered in your first aid training.

Sharks and crocodiles

Sharks and crocodiles are ambush predators and opportunistic feeders. There are many types of sharks around Australia; most pose little threat to humans. Freshwater and estuarine crocodiles are known to inhabit the tidal areas and inland waterways of northern Australia.

Safety advice and risk management regarding sharks and crocodiles aim to avoid encounters with these marine creatures. As a lifeguard you should keep watch for any sign of sharks or crocodiles. You can adopt an elevated surveillance position and wear polarised sunglasses to increase your effective vision over a greater distance. If you are in a region known to have saltwater crocodiles, you should also frequently check for slide marks on the shoreline and maintain surveillance of the water around the red and yellow flags to avoid encounters.

Risk management

To reduce the chances of encountering sharks, you should avoid swimming:

- at dawn and dusk
- at river mouths or in murky, discoloured or brackish water
- in or around schools of fish.

Throughout northern Australia there are warning signs placed at access points to waterways where crocodiles might live. Refer to your local government's '*crocwise*' website for more information on how to avoid a crocodile encounter.

Actions on sighting

If you sight a shark or crocodile, you should follow your local SOPs and:

- do not attempt to kill or capture the creature
- request all swimmers leave the water
- record as much detail as possible regarding your sighting, e.g., size, behaviour, presence of fish.

Actions in the event of a shark or crocodile bite

Shark and crocodile bites can result in massive tissue damage and severe blood loss. You want to safely bring the victim to shore as soon as possible to apply first aid as per your training and arrange for advanced emergency care. You should continue to manage risks and work effectively as a member of your patrol team at every stage of a shark or crocodile response plan.

Refer to your local SOPs for more information about actions to take in the event of a shark or crocodile sighting, encounter or bite.



Manual handling

Everyone should follow safe manual handling practices. You may injure yourself, harm others or cause equipment damage if you do not handle and manoeuvre victims or equipment safely. A risk assessment should be done before any new manual handling task to help you minimise the risk of sustaining or aggravating an injury.

A typical workplace injury is to the lower back, caused by incorrect lifting or handling of heavy, awkward or large objects. Heavy items should be transported with the assistance of other people or with the assistance of devices such as a trolley, trailer, side-by-side vehicle (SSV) or another vehicle. Objects like a surfboat, fully laden IRB, outboard motor and IRB floorboards are particularly heavy and/or awkward, and they require careful handling and manoeuvring [2]. Conduct the lifting and carrying of victims by following your training available in the *Rescue* module of this manual. The use of team carries and spinal boards is recommended for a victim who is not able to move themselves.

How to lift

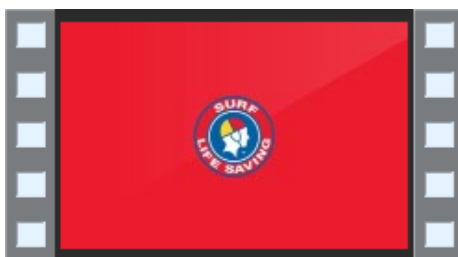
It is important that the environment or area that you are required to lift in is safe. This will depend upon things such as:

- how far you have to carry equipment or goods
- the size and weight of mobile equipment
- the number of obstructions along the transport route
- the storage method of the equipment
- the terrain you have to negotiate
- where and how equipment is laid out.

Below is a set of steps that describes how to lift correctly and with care. Follow these steps when lifting heavy items on your own or with two or more people.

1. Face in the direction of where you intend to lift.
2. Bend the knees and crouch down, with a straight back.
3. Balance with a wide base of support and take hold of the object securely.
4. Keep the load close to the body wherever possible.
5. One person coordinates and calls the lift if two or more people are lifting.
6. Brace your stomach muscles and, while keeping your back in a neutral position, lift the object using your legs.

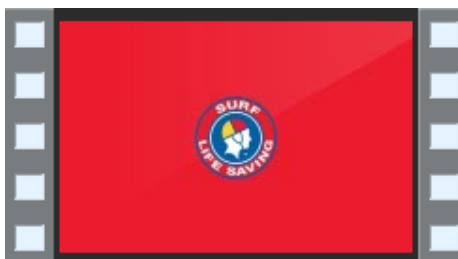
Refer to the [SLSA Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs](#) in the SLS Members Area Document Library for more information on manual handling. You can also view a video on correct that show the steps to correctly lift heavy items here.



Video – How to lift safely

Lifting equipment

The guidelines below should be followed for heavy surf lifesaving equipment when a 'straight lift and short carry' is required. A video on how to lift SLS equipment can be viewed here.



Video – IRB lift and carry

Please be aware that there may be various state/territory regulations that specify lifting and carrying limits. Refer to the *SLSA Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs* in the SLS Members Area for more information on lifting equipment safely.

SLS equipment	Safe handling procedures
IRB (unladen)	The hull is to be lifted by a minimum of two people and transported on a trailer by SSV or 4WD to and from beach.
IRB (fully laden)	The hull is to be lifted by a minimum of four people and transported on a trailer by SSV or 4WD to and from beach.
Outboard motor	To be lifted by two people and transported by trolley or similar to and from beach.
Fuel tanks	To be lifted by two people and transported by trolley or similar to and from beach.
Surfboat	To be lifted by a minimum of five people; in many cases it is necessary to have six or more. To be transported by rollers only for short distances of 50 m if flat terrain. If hills need to be negotiated, then an SSV or 4WD should be used.
Other objects— signs/poles, tents and rescue boards	These items should also be transported with safe handling procedures in mind. A risk assessment should be done prior to embarking on any new manual handling task.

Table 4 - Examples of how to lift SLS equipment

Personal injury

All surf lifesavers and lifeguards are entitled to make a claim under workers compensation or equivalent insurance in the event of sustaining a personal injury while performing their duties.

Members injured in the course of their duties need to follow their surf lifesaving club or service's injury management and reporting processes. Your club safety officer (or elected WHS representative) oversees these processes. Although each state/territory in Australia has a slightly different reporting system in place, the end result is the same.

Personal injury reporting



Significant injuries are those which:

- require hospital admission or ongoing medical management
- interrupt your paid working life or school/university studies.

Your club safety officer will provide you with the necessary information to complete this form and assist you with your application.

Any member recovering from a significant injury or illness may not be able to return to duties or participate in surf sports activities until the club safety officer receives a final 'fit to return to duties' declaration form (aka 'certificate of capacity') from their treating medical practitioner.

Refer to the *SLSA Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs* for more information about personal injury management and return to surf duties.

Physical health

Being physically active and limiting your sedentary behaviour every day is essential to develop and maintain your overall physical and mental wellbeing.

The benefits of regular physical activity include:

- creating opportunities for meeting new people and socialising
- enhancing overall quality of life
- helping build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints to reduce the risk of injury

- helping prevent or manage mental health problems
- reducing the risk of many preventable diseases, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

The [*Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines*](#) (PASBG) produced by the Australian Department of Health recommends the following advice for adults.

- Be active most days every week—every day is preferable.
- Accumulate 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week.
- Do muscle strengthening activities on at least 2 days each week.

The full guidelines also recommend minimising and breaking up long periods of sedentary behaviour, such as sitting. Fortunately, the surf lifesaving environment provides the perfect background for those wanting to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Fitness levels for lifesaving/lifeguarding

It is important to maintain an appropriate level of physical health and fitness to ensure the safety of yourself as well as those for whom you hold a duty of care. SLSA follows the minimum standards of fitness testing set out by the International Life Saving Federation (ILS) [3]. Each patrolling member must take part in an annual skills maintenance session to demonstrate they meet the minimum fitness levels for duty.

SLSA has special provisions that allow those with permanent and limiting disabilities to take part in varying levels of activity. SLS members who wish to continue to undertake lifesaving activities while pregnant should refer to *SLSA Member Support Guideline* available in the SLSA Members Area Document Library.

Speak with your patrol captain before commencing patrol, or your trainer before commencing training activities, if you have any concerns relating to your level of fitness to perform lifesaving activities.

Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol, drugs and aquatic activities do not mix. Although the effects vary from person to person, there are some common effects that place both lifesavers and victims at risk.

- Depressants such as alcohol and cannabis can affect concentration and coordination. They can lower inhibitions and slow down one's ability to respond to emergency situations. They are also known to cause drowsiness, vomiting, unconsciousness and even death.
- Stimulants such as amphetamines, nicotine and ecstasy are known to cause anxiety and panic attacks, seizures, stomach cramps, aggression and paranoia.

As part of your duty of care, you should minimise alcohol intake the night before duty, as blood alcohol concentration remains high for 12 to 20 hours after the last drink. You should also ensure that you are not under the influence of any drugs that may affect your performance while on duty.

For more information about preventing and minimising the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs, refer to [*Australia's Alcohol and Drug Foundation*](#).

Cigarette smoking

Smoking tobacco is a major risk factor linked to several chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, lung disease and many known cancers. The associated respiratory distress caused by the irritants in cigarette smoke and second-hand smoke will drastically affect your health and ability to perform a rescue.

Smoking is banned in many public spaces including parks and beaches in some states. SLSA does not allow members to smoke while undertaking their lifesaving duties, participating in special events and other official activities such as coaching, officiating and attending meetings.

All SLS work and storage areas, vehicles and craft are smoke-free zones.



Diet and hydration

Eating a healthy and well-balanced diet can help give you the physical and mental energy to perform in the role of a lifesaver.

There are many sources of dietary advice and many surf lifesaving clubs have qualified sports coaches who can provide basic dietary guidance. Current Australian dietary guidelines from the National Health and Medical Research Council can be found at www.eatforhealth.gov.au. Those with special needs should seek advice from a qualified nutritionist.

Dehydration of as little as 2 per cent loss of body weight results in impaired physiological responses and performance [4]. Lifesavers often patrol in hot conditions, so maintaining hydration is important for them in keeping well, and in preventing fatigue. If you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated and need to replace fluids and electrolytes quickly. Other signs and symptoms of dehydration that affect your ability to rescue include cramps in any muscle, headaches and nausea.

Water is the primary replacement fluid; however, rehydration fluids and sports drinks are suitable in moderation. Current recommendations of water intake by life stage and gender can be found at www.nrv.gov.au/nutrients/water.



Medication

Medications can sometimes cause unwanted or unexpected side effects, which may influence your ability to participate in a rescue. You can try to avoid side effects by taking medicines according to their instructions. Speak with your doctor if anything worries you after taking your medicine.

Sun protection



Dangers of exposure to sun

Exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) radiation in natural sunlight is a major cause of:

- eye damage such as cataracts and pterygium
- general skin damage
- skin cancers
- sunburn.

The very nature of SLS activities means that you are exposing your body to the sun and the associated health risks. You should have your skin checked by a doctor at least every 12 months, or more frequently if:

- your exposure is very high
- you notice new spots or changes to long-standing moles
- your doctor recommends frequent visits due to your skin type or history.

You should also set a good sun-safe example for younger SLS members and the community in general to follow.


Skin cancer is preventable, and melanomas may be cured if detected and treated early enough. Checking your skin regularly and knowing what to look for could save your life. The [Cancer Council Australia](#) has a useful guide outlining [how to check for signs of skin cancer](#), which includes the ABCDE guidelines of melanoma detection guide. SLSA recommends following these guidelines and contacting your doctor as soon as possible if you think you have any of the warning signs of skin cancer.

Guidelines and scientific literature referred to in this section are derived from Cancer Council Australia and Melanoma Institute.

ABCDE GUIDELINES

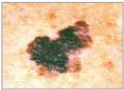
ARE A USEFUL WAY TO MONITOR YOUR SKIN FOR EARLY SIGNS OF MELANOMA.
Seek expert advice if you notice any of the following in a skin lesion:

A
ASYMMETRY




One half does not match the other.

B
BORDER



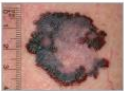
Irregularity
The edges are irregular, ragged, notched or blurred.

C
COLOUR



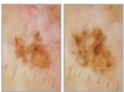
Variation
The colour is not the same all over, but may have shades of brown or black, or even red, white or blue.

D
DIAMETER




The area is larger than 6mm or is growing larger.

E
EVOLVING




Changing in size, shape, colour, elevation or another trait (such as itching, bleeding or crusting).


PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE SUN IN FIVE WAYS




Seek shade, especially in the hottest part of the day




Wear sun-protective clothing that covers your back, shoulders, arms and legs




Wear a broad-brimmed hat




Apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30+ every 2 hours and after swimming or exercise



Wear wrap-around sunglasses



MELANOMA INSTITUTE AUSTRALIA



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Preventing sun damage

As part of your duty of care to yourself, you should take all measures to protect yourself against the sun's deadly and dangerous UV radiation. As indicated in the *SLSA Environmental Factors Guideline* for sun safety, important prevention measures can be remembered by the six Ss:

1. Seek shade



- Stay in the natural or man-made shade whenever possible
- Use SunSmart's [Shade Audit Tool](#) that allows you to assess the quality and need for shade at various sites within your location.

2. Slip into protective clothing



- Protect yourself with shoes and loose-fitting clothing made of UPF 50+ close-weave material. Start with long patrol shorts and a patrol shirt with long sleeves and collar or an appropriate rash shirt or wetsuit if in or on the water.

3. Slop on some sunscreen



- Apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before going out into the sun and reapply it every 2–3 hours, or more often after swimming, sweating or exercise.
- Physical sunscreens such as Zinc cream are good to use on the lips and other small, sensitive areas.
- Remember, never use sunscreen to extend the time you spend in the sun or as your only form of sun protection.
- Use a high-protection (SPF 30+ or SPF 50+), broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen on the face, neck and other areas of the skin that cannot be covered with clothing.
- Use a different type of sunscreen for the skin on your body and your face.

4. Slap on a hat



- Hats should protect your face, head, neck and ears from the sun's UV rays.
- Ideally hats should be made of a close-weave material.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat with a non-reflective underside of the brim (minimum brim width of 8 cm). Alternatively wear a 'legionnaire' style hat with side pieces.

5. Slide on some sunglasses

- Use only sunglasses that conform to Australian Standards for eye and face protection—block 100 per cent of the sun’s UV rays and have an eye protection factor (‘EPF’) of 10 at least.
- Sunglasses should also be curved or have side pieces to prevent UV rays entering from the sides.

6. Study the UV index

- Take care to avoid sunshine when the UV index is 3 or above (as indicated by the [Bureau of Meteorology](#)).
- UV radiation levels are highest during the middle of the day, which is often when there are more beachgoers.

Note:

- Remember to protect yourself from the sunlight reflected from the surfaces of the water and sand.
- Do not break any blisters or apply lotions, ointments, creams or powders other than hydrogel to sunburnt skin.
- Do not use ice or ice water to cool a sunburn as further tissue damage may result.
- If your skin shows signs of sunburn (‘radiation burn’) while on patrol, seek shade and cool your sunburnt skin with cool running water for 20 minutes while also drinking small amounts of clear fluids. Drink extra fluids and moisturise to stay hydrated in the days following a sunburn.
- Seek medical advice if you experience blistering near 10 per cent of your body or if you are in doubt.

Mental health

Good mental health (‘social and emotional wellbeing’) is important for your wellbeing and resilience and will help you perform effectively in your role as a lifesaver.

Mental ill-health can result from relationship issues and life stressors, such as work-related stress or a critical incident, and may affect your capacity to manage your day-to-day life to the best of your ability. It is not always visible, and a person may experience significant mental health consequences including social isolation, loss of relationships, unemployment, homelessness, financial stress or discrimination and possible diagnosed mental health issues.

In addition to critical incident support, Surf Life Saving promotes many preventive factors that can help you maintain good mental health such as positive relationships, physical activity and a good diet, feeling connected to community and culture, and having a sense of purpose.

SLS members should communicate positively about good mental health as well as mental health problems, which can affect people of all ages and backgrounds.



Work-related stress

Lifesavers must be aware of the psychological hazards that can lead to elevated levels, or prolonged periods, of work-related stress while undertaking their volunteering duties. Work-related stress can increase the risk of both psychological and physical injuries. Promoting a culture of safety and wellbeing includes ensuring lifesavers care for their own psychological wellbeing, as well as that of others.

Examples of psychological hazards in the lifesaving environment that can be contributing factors to work-related stress include:

- bullying and harassment, disrespectful interactions
- lack of support and/or lack of positive workplace relationships
- poor organisational management
- poor work/life balance
- remote or isolated work
- substandard environmental conditions
- traumatic events.

Signs and symptoms

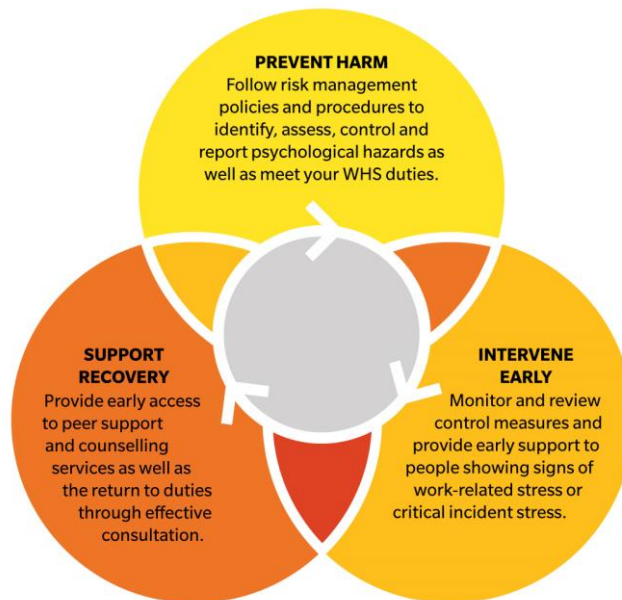
Some common signs and symptoms of work-related stress you may notice in yourself or others include:

- becoming aggressive, irritable, socially isolated or withdrawn
- experiencing panic or anxiety
- feeling tense, overwhelmed, unwell or unsafe
- frequently arriving late or avoiding work
- inability to focus or complete tasks
- out-of-character changes in behaviour or appearance
- racing heart or a tightening of the chest
- sleep disturbance
- weight or appetite changes.

Refer to the *SLS Member Safety Brochure* for more examples of signs and symptoms.

Management of work-related stress

Psychological hazards that lead to work-related stress are managed using the same risk management process applied to physical hazards. Safe Work Australia recommends a systematic approach to mental health and safety.



There are many coping strategies that you can adopt to prevent harm and support recovery from work-related stress. Not all strategies work well for everyone, so it is important to find and apply the strategies that work best for you. The following are examples of actions you may take to support recovery.

- For yourself, you should:
 - acknowledge how you are feeling
 - alternate regular periods of exercise, sleep and relaxation
 - eat well-balanced meals
 - engage in social activities and positive thinking
 - feel safe to talk about your feelings with people you trust
 - focus on the present
 - keep to a daily routine and regular schedule
 - perform slow-breathing exercises
 - spend time with your significant others.
- For your team members, their friends and families, you should:
 - ask what you can do to help
 - be available to listen patiently and non-judgementally
 - let them know you want to understand and that you do not take emotional outbursts personally
 - reassure them that recovery is possible, and they can safely express their feelings with you.

The following are examples of actions you should avoid to support your recovery as well as prevent harm:

- avoiding your feelings
- comparing your stress reactions to others
- increasing amounts of alcohol, caffeine, sugar or other stimulants
- making big life changes or decisions
- taking on too many responsibilities
- telling stories about other incidents.

Critical incident stress



The nature of lifesaving activities means that lifesavers may be exposed to critical incidents. Critical incidents are traumatic events that may be sudden, overwhelming, threatening, drawn out or repeated. Critical incident stress (CIS) is a natural response to the emotional and physical impact of exposure to a critical incident. Understanding and supporting those affected by CIS can make a positive difference to their social and emotional wellbeing as well as promote a safe surf lifesaving club environment.

Examples of traumatic events that may lead to critical incident stress may include the recovery of a drowned person, the administration of major first aid treatment, performing resuscitation, or a perceived threat to the lifesaver's own life in challenging surf conditions.

SLS members that may be more susceptible to harm from exposure to critical incidents include:

- new or young members
- members who are currently experiencing difficult personal circumstances
- members with an existing disability, injury or illness
- members previously exposed to a traumatic event
- members performing in roles repeatedly exposed to traumatic events.

Signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms of critical incident stress are very similar to the signs and symptoms of work-related stress, but may also include:

- emotional outbursts, including fear, anger, sadness or shame
- feelings of helplessness
- flashbacks
- hyper-vigilance.

Refer to the *SLS Member Safety Brochure* for more examples of signs and symptoms.

Management of critical incident stress

Critical incident stress management helps people deal with the natural emotional and physical impact of exposure to a critical incident or an accumulation of smaller incidents. The emotional and physical signs and symptoms of CIS can happen immediately after the event or after a period of time. It is important to monitor and support both yourself and your fellow members over time following a critical incident. Not all people will experience CIS, however it is helpful to have a broad knowledge of what it is, should it happen.

Psychological first aid (PFA) helps people cope with their initial distress in response to a critical incident. It is based on an understanding that people who experience trauma may experience a range of emotional, psychological, behavioural or physical responses, and that some of these responses might interfere with their ability to cope.

PFA is an appropriate approach to use with people who have directly experienced or witnessed trauma, including lifesavers and other emergency response service workers. It includes practical strategies to ensure a calm, compassionate and supportive environment that promotes psychological recovery after trauma. It is not a debrief or counselling and does not seek out details of the traumatic experience.

Lifesavers should remember to respond to fellow members and others who have directly experienced or witnessed a traumatic event with compassion and kindness, and provide a calm, caring and supportive environment. This can be achieved by applying the basic action principles of psychological first aid (See Table 5) and maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

Basic action principles of psychological first aid			
		Basic principles	Examples of this in action
A	Assess and ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess for safety, urgent physical needs, and serious reactions. Ask for the person's needs and concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring the environment is safe Checking in with the person as to what their needs and concerns are
B	Be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be attentive. Be respectful. Be aware. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing people space to collect their thoughts Communicating respectfully Being aware of non-verbal communication
C	Comfort and coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comfort the person. Help them to use their coping strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comforting the person with your reassuring presence Communicating effectively what to expect next
D	Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do address any practical needs. Do link the person with loved ones and other support options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing water, shade, warmth or access to bathrooms Helping the person to call their friends or family
E	End/Exit strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exit when the person is with their loved ones or other support options. End the scene by taking time for your own self-care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaving a beachgoer with their support person(s) or paramedics and recommending they speak with a mental health professional or a SLS peer support officer Leaving the SLS member connected with their support person(s) or patrol captain and the <i>SLS Member Safety Brochure</i> Reading the <i>SLS Member Safety Brochure</i> and applying coping strategies outlined in this manual Speaking with a mental health professional

Table 5—Basic action principles of psychological first aid

For more information on PFA, refer to the [World Health Organisation](#) or your local governmental health department. Some surf lifesaving clubs also offer peer support programs that SLS members can access for more information and training on PFA.

Critical incident on patrol

Immediately after an incident, your patrol captain will apply the principles of psychological first aid to review the safety and wellbeing of patrol members. All SLS members involved in a critical incident are encouraged to apply the same principles.

An available club, peer support or duty officer should invite questions, discuss issues of concern, remind SLS members of support options available to them and inform those involved of what to expect next.

Operational debrief

An operational debrief is a structured session for SLS members carried out by a duty officer. It is usually held 2–3 days following an incident. During this session, you can expect a duty officer to:

- ask for feedback to improve operations in similar future situations or incidents
- gather documentation for the historical record or planning purposes
- identify what happened as well as the causes and consequences
- offer additional information about natural reactions to critical incidents and advice on critical incident stress management
- refer members who require additional assistance with critical incident stress management to a mental health professional.

Mental health conversations

Often the road to recovery starts with a conversation.

The following steps can help you to provide early support and connect with a fellow SLS member (or significant other) showing signs or expressing symptoms of work-related stress or critical incident stress.

1. Ask—choose a relatively private and informal time and ask them if they are OK.
2. Listen—take what they say seriously and do not judge them or rush the conversation.
3. Encourage action—ask what self-help actions they want to take; be supportive.
4. Check-in—ask how they are going every few days.

For more information on how to start a conversation, refer to the [RUOK](#) website or consider taking a Mental Health First Aid course.

Support services

If you or another SLS member shows or experiences persistent signs and symptoms of work-related or critical incident stress, you should talk to your local lifesaving support network and peer support officer or contact your SLS state centre where confidential counselling can be arranged. This is similar to an employee assistance program ('EAP') that many workplaces use.

There are also several organisations that provide free and confidential mental health services if you are feeling depressed, stressed or anxious. For example:

Lifeline lifeline.org.au 13 11 14	MensLine mensline.org.au 1300 78 99 78	Kids Help Line kidshelpline.com.au 1800 551 800	Suicide call back service suicidecallbackservice.org.au 1300 659 467
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These organisations can also assist you with more information and advice about mental health:

Beyond Blue beyondblue.org.au	Heads up headsup.org.au	SANE Australia sane.org
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Member protection

SLSA is dedicated to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all participating in surf lifesaving activities and is committed to being an inclusive organisation open to all who wish to participate regardless of age, gender, disability, cultural and linguistic background or sexual orientation.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

All SLS entities regard discrimination, bullying and harassment in all forms as unacceptable and SLSA takes all reasonable steps to make sure that this does not occur in surf life saving clubs.

Definitions

- Discrimination—happens when there is adverse action because of a person’s characteristics, such as their age, race, religion or sex.
- Bullying—is repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards an individual or group that creates a risk to their health and safety.
- Harassment—is any form of behaviour that you do not want, offends, humiliates or intimidates you, or creates a hostile environment.

SLS members need to take steps such as those referenced in SLSA policies, guidelines and procedures relating to member protection and social media to prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination from occurring and respond quickly if they do by following the appropriate reporting procedures. There are also legal and moral obligations you should consider not to breach Australia’s national workplace anti-bullying and discrimination laws.

Not all behaviour that makes someone feel upset or undervalued is bullying or harassment. If you would like to know more about what is and what is not discrimination, bullying and harassment, as well as what your rights are and the rights of other SLS members, you may also refer to:

- the Australian Government’s Fair Work Ombudsman (fairwork.gov.au)
- the [Australian Human Rights Council](#)
- relevant [laws that operate at a state and territory level](#)
- [Safe Work Australia](#)
- [SLSA Policy 6.05 Member Protection](#).



Safeguarding children and young people

Surf Life Saving is committed to the safeguarding of children and young people who are often more susceptible to abuse and harm.

SLSA Policy 6.05, clause 3.5 'Codes of Conduct' outlines the SLSA codes of conduct that apply to all SLS members. The [SLSA Safeguarding Children and Young People Guidelines](#) supports members to enact this policy and identify inappropriate behaviours that do not uphold the codes of conduct.

You have a responsibility to report breaches of the SLSA codes of conduct and any child safety concerns via the online *Child Protection Report Form* or *Complaint and Grievance Form* available at forms.sls.com.au. Reports can remain anonymous, are confidential and may result in disciplinary or criminal action.

SLSA has developed the *SLS Safeguarding Children and Young People (SCYP)* program, which provides resources and online awareness training on the SLSA codes of conduct for dealing with children and young people, behavioural indicators of abuse and neglect, and how to make a report regarding any inappropriate behaviour. All members are encouraged to undertake the online SCYP awareness training available at sls.com.au/safeguarding.



Raising concerns

Everyone involved in SLS is encouraged to voice their concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of themselves and other SLS members. Concerns may be raised in the form of a complaint or report.

Most concerns are initially raised and dealt with at club or branch level, however there may be some situations in which it is more appropriate to raise a complaint or report with your SLS state centre.

Refer to the *SLSA Reporting and Complaints Guidelines* (within *SLSA Policy 6.05 Member Protection—Appendix C*) in the SLS Members Area Document Library for more information on types of complaints as well as guidelines for each step in the complaints process.

The forms used to raise concern can be accessed at forms.sls.com.au.

References

- [1] Lifesaving Position Statement LPS-19 2016 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) ILSF, p3-4.
<https://www.ilsf.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/01/LPS-19-2016-Personal-Protective-Equipment-PPE.pdf>

- [2] Nelson A & Baptiste AS (2006). 'Evidence-based practices for safe patient handling and movement'. Orthopaedic Nursing. 25(6):366–70. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17130758>

- [3] Lifesaving Position Statement LPS-07 2016 Fitness testing for lifeguards ILS <https://www.ilsf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/LPS-07-2016-Fitness-testing-for-lifeguards.pdf>

- [4] National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, New Zealand Ministry of Health. Nutrient reference values for Australia and New Zealand including recommended dietary intakes. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; 2006. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nutrient-reference-values-australia-and-new-zealand-including-recommended-dietary-intakes>