

Last Ranger Next Ranger

South Atlantic Division is adopting this After Action Report (AAR) as an exercise following a recreation-related public fatality. Last Ranger/Next Ranger is an effective tool in evaluating the circumstances surrounding the incident to identify preventive strategies for the future. The process promotes communication and the sharing of lessons learned. It also serves as a catalyst to emotionally and mentally "work through" the trauma surrounding these incidents. The purpose is to learn and implement appropriate improvements and processes that will prevent future fatalities. Last Ranger/Next Ranger process is made up of three components

1. Summary:

This information is a summary of the facts about the incident. It is primarily the same information that is included in the electronic report that is prepared by the ranger and forwarded to the district and division within 48 hours of a recreation-related public fatality.

2. Last Ranger:

Prior to the fatality, what were the potential opportunities for a ranger or other Corps team member to interact with the victim?

Some Examples include:

- At the Control Station to the recreation area
- Visitor Information Center
- Personal contact (bicycle patrol, foot & vehicle patrol)
- Outreach programs at schools, boat shows, festivals, Career Days, Health Days, Water Sports Safety Day, Fishing Tournaments, swim beaches, campgrounds, boat ramps
- Written contact - Posters, Flyers, brochures, news articles, signage

3. Next Ranger:

Includes an analysis of what could be done better, smarter, differently, in the future to help prevent other similar fatalities?

Review and evaluate the circumstances surrounding the fatality. How can you influence similar situations to keep them from occurring again? Analyze the data gathered in the "Last Ranger". What can be improved or done differently?

Last Ranger / Next Ranger

26 May 2002 - Near-Drowning - Lake Discovery

Summary:

Near-Drowning Victim

Mr. Joseph Doe

Everytown, US

White Male – between 40 and 45, 5’10” tall, 200 + lbs.

At approximately 1410, Mr. Doe and his wife arrived at the Lake Boat Ramp courtesy dock. After arriving at the dock, they removed their life jackets and began to try to move their boat to shore. Mr. Doe was standing on the east side of the floating courtesy dock attempting to hold onto the boat and Mrs. Doe was standing on the shore holding the end of a line connected to the boat. Mr. Doe lost his balance and went feet-first into the water, between the dock and the boat. When Mr. Doe surfaced he appeared to be trying to tread water, but almost immediately began to panic and slap the water.

Mr. John Q. Public, Jr. was standing on the dock, grabbed the Life Jugs and threw them to Mr. Doe. Mr. Doe took the jugs in his arms and calmed a little, but was still thrashing. I was working as Duty Ranger and had been on the sidewalk leading to the dock when I saw Mr. Doe enter the water. I initially moved to the bank adjacent to Mr. Doe intending to help him out of the water and help his wife pull in the boat, but it became immediately apparent that Mr. Doe was unable swim.

Mr. Public offered to jump in to aid Mr. Doe, but I asked him not to, and indicated that the Life Jugs were supporting Mr. Doe. I spoke to Mr. Doe and encouraged him to move toward the shore since he was less than 10 feet from water he could stand in. Mr. Doe was unable to make any progress to the shore. Bystanders on the dock tried to reach to Mr. Doe from the dock with a kneeboard but the board was too short, so they pushed it to him to provide additional flotation.

A man passing on a personal watercraft moved to aid Mr. Doe (after cutting off his engine) and Mr. Doe held on. A man on the dock tossed Mr. Doe the end of a ski rope and pulled them to the dock. I had moved to the dock and spoke to Mr. Doe, who indicated that he was tired. We used the ski rope to pull Mr. Doe to safety on the shore. Mr. Doe was able to walk out of the water under his own power. Mr. Doe indicated he was tired and a little shaken and that he did not want any medical attention. The entire incident lasted less than 2 minutes.

I remained in the area and monitored Mr. Doe. After a short rest Mr. Doe regained his composure and was able to put his boat on the trailer (with his life jacket on). The Does left the area at approximately 1450.

Last Ranger:

The Duty Ranger was present at the Lake Boat Ramp for several periods that day (approximately 0850 – 0950, 1220 – 1300, and 1330 – 1455) handing out lake brochures, answering questions, and encouraging visitors to wear their life jackets. It is not known when the Does launched or if they had direct interaction with a ranger at that time.

A banner with text “Save a Life – Wear a Life Jacket” was posted along the entrance road to the Lake Boat Ramp. The bulletin board at the boat ramp contained several posters with water safety messages in both English and Spanish stressing the importance of life jackets. The Child life jacket message (PFD with sign that states “This is your child’s best friend”) was also on display at the bulletin board.

Next Ranger:

COE Rangers will continue to engage visitors at Lake Boat Ramp and provide information about water safety, natural resources and available recreation facilities. Bulletin boards, posters, banners and other displays will continue to be utilized to educate and influence visitors.

We will modify our operations to address lessons learned.

1. Rangers will stress the need for boaters and other recreationist to wear life jackets until they completely off the water. Although the Does were wearing their life jackets while they were boating, they had removed them upon reaching the dock.
2. Will install a reach pole in the boat ramp area. The Life Jugs and Life Jug sign were in place on the floating dock and were utilized to save a life. Actually pulling the victim to shore would have been aided by a reach pole.
3. The actual life jugs used to save the victim will be taken out of service and utilized in water safety outreach programs as a teaching tool (demonstrated to kids and identified as actual jugs that saved a life), but with emphasis on life jackets as the smart way to avoid needing Life Jugs.
4. Acknowledge and publicize the actions of Mr. Public, whose quick thinking saved a life. Use the publicity to stress the need to wear a life jacket until completely off the water. Operations Manager has thanked Mr. Public, Jr. and discussed the event

with Mr. Public, Sr. to ensure the father understood the significance of his son's life-saving actions. A letter of appreciation has been prepared from Lake Discovery Project and is attached. Notice of Mr. Public's actions is being forwarded to the State Water Commission for possible acknowledgement. Copies of the Last Ranger/Next Ranger Report and letter of appreciation are being shared with Public Affairs Office along with a request to prepare an article for Mr. Public's hometown newspaper.

Rodney Ranger
Lake Discovery

LAST RANGER / NEXT RANGER

12 July 2004 – Drowning – Lake Discovery

Summary:

Mr. Joseph Doe
Everytown, US

On 10 July 2004 at 1615, Mr. Doe, age 34 was riding a PWC in Lake Discovery approximately ¼ mile east of Creek Access on the north side of the lake. Mr. Doe's wife was a passenger on the PWC. Her report stated that they had both fallen off of the PWC after an abrupt turn. After Mr. Doe had successfully re-boarded the vessel, Mrs. Doe apparently re-boarded and inadvertently turned the PWC over again. At this point, Mr. Doe's USCG approved type III PFD became entangled in the left handlebar of the PWC as it became inverted again. This entanglement functioned as a restraint and left Mr. Doe's head 80% submerged. Due to high boat traffic, the reservoir was choppy and the waves subsequently proved too high to allow Mr. Doe to breathe normally. A passing boater stopped and struggled to free Mr. Doe at which time he dragged the victim aboard a nearby pontoon boat. CPR was initiated by passengers and gained no response. COE ranger and State Water Commission officer were on lake patrol and responded. Upon arrival, the ranger and officer took charge of CPR, which was administered without positive response until emergency vehicles arrived in Discovery Campground. At this time, the victim was transported to the waiting emergency personnel. Upon transfer to EMTs on scene, Mr. Doe was pronounced dead at 1637 hours, Saturday, July 10, 2004.

LAST RANGER/LAST OPPORTUNITY:

Park Rangers were on duty in the area from 0730 until 0030. Lake patrols by rangers had been conducted at 0900, 1100, and 1300. A joint lake patrol between Corps rangers and State Water Commission was being conducted at the time of the accident. In each patrol, rangers encourage people boat safely and with a friend and to practice other water safety techniques.

The Bulletin Board at the victim's launch site is posted with Water Safety Information.

Local radio stations air water safety messages given by Corps rangers each morning.

Water safety programs were conducted that week to advise people of the hazards of swimming and boating and the techniques of safe PFD use. In the week previous to the accident, rangers had given over 8 hours of water safety programs and had reached approximately 160 visitors.

NEXT RANGER / NEXT OPPORTUNITY:

Rangers continue to patrol all fee lands and the entire reservoir, performing Visitor Assistance and encouraging the safety of all visitors.

Bulletin Board information provides safety related information pertaining to water safety.

Rangers continue to support efforts of the Safe Kids Program, co-sponsoring the YMCA learn to swim program, and partnering with State Water Commission and Sheriff's Department to promote boating and water safety.

Continue to encourage water safety to all visiting public and conduct water safety programs that are free of charge and open to the public. These programs will now include a greater emphasis on safe PWC use and proper PFD use, to the extent of advising how to be familiar enough with your PFD to remove it in emergency situations.

Lake Discovery also provides assistance to local communities, businesses, and the State with water safety information and materials for distribution.

Rodney Ranger
Lake Discovery

Last Ranger / Next Ranger

20 June 2004 - Drowning – Lake Discovery

Summary:

Mr. Joseph Doe
Everytown, US

At approximately 1245 hours, 36-year-old Mr. Doe and his two young sons, ages 5 and 7, were on a Bayliner boat 150 yds from Lake Beach. Mr. Doe climbed up on the boat to put up a canopy when a gust of wind blew him off balance and into the water. He was not wearing a life jacket, however his two sons were wearing theirs. Nearby boaters heard the children's cries for help and made their way to the scene. Mr. Public and his son were canoeing not too far from Mr. Doe's boat and they responded as well. When Mr. Public's canoe got close to the victim, he threw Mr. Doe a life jacket. The life jacket landed within a foot of Mr. Doe, but he was unable to grab it and went under. Mr. Public called 911 on his cell phone while another boater, Angela Any-Woman, pulled alongside Mr. Doe's Bayliner to see if she could help. Ms. Any-Woman boarded Mr. Doe's boat to comfort his children.

Search efforts began around 1300 with the arrival of State Water Commission staff, Discovery County Sheriff's Office, and local rescue crews. Divers from local counties arrived, and boats from State Water Commission were launched shortly thereafter. The search continued until 2100 hours when it was suspended until 0700 hours on June 21. The Underwater Response Team and Fire Department recovered the body at approximately 0955 in about 20 feet of water approximately 200 feet from the shore at Lake Beach.

Last Ranger:

Mr. Doe had launched from Lake Boat Ramp and State Water Commission had physical presence with permanent rangers and seasonal personnel at both Lake Boat Ramp and Lake Beach Day Use Area on June 20. There was no COE presence at Lake Boat Ramp or Lake Beach that day.

Last opportunity to interact with or influence family:

The entrance station to Lake Boat Ramp was open and manned on 20 June 2004 and would have been one of the last opportunities for direct contact by employees of State Water Commission. The entrance station is manned by temporary, non-ranger employees, engaged in fee collection and site information services, however State Water Commission does not expect fee collectors to provide visitors with a water safety message.

On occasion, printed safety materials in both English and Spanish are handed out to visitors. On the entrance station, facing vehicles as they drive into the park, there is a child sized life jacket and a sign that reads "This Is Your Child's Best Friend". An State Water Commission bulletin board to the right of the Lake Boat Ramp provided safety information including "Buoy and Waterway Markings Used at Lake Discovery" as well as COE "Play It Safe" water safety tips in Spanish and English. A COE "It Won't Work If You Don't Wear It!" sign including a picture of a life jacket hangs on a signpost in between the two launching lanes.

As the accident happened quite near Lake Beach Day Use Area, I investigated there for safety information as well. Since the family wouldn't have driven into the recreation area, they would not have seen safety information on the entrance road. The most likely place that the Doe family would have been at Lake Beach is the boat beach. Swimming is prohibited at this beach; it is only for bringing boats ashore for picnicking or to use the adjacent comfort station. There was no obvious safety information at this boat beach or comfort station. It is not know whether the Doe family actually stopped at Lake Beach or not.

Next Ranger:

Mr. Doe had the right idea by putting both his 5 and 7 year-old sons in their life jackets, however, like so many parents on the water, failed to wear his own. This is a common problem at all projects and there is an obvious need for outreach directed at parents for their own good as well as their children's. The COE organizes water safety programs for hundreds of school children each year and programs are also given at State Water Commission Day Use Areas. As children are far more impressionable than adults, these programs are given in the hopes that the children will teach the parents. In light of this most recent drowning, perhaps this is not enough.

Adults are a tough audience to reach and often will not take water safety tips seriously when they are given in the context of their own safety. I am of the opinion that the adult ego is to blame for this. A shift of tactics may be in order for those of us promoting water safety. Perhaps appealing to parents' devotion to their children by reminding them how much their children need them in their lives would work. Mr. Doe's death is a very good example of this. His three young children and the one on the way don't have a father any longer because he didn't think he needed to wear his life jacket. All family and friends of the Doe's stated that he was a strong swimmer, but many adults underestimate the role that panic can play in a situation like this. Mr. Public, the gentlemen who threw a life jacket to Mr. Doe stated in the police report that "[Doe] looked as if he was in a state of panic or shock". Being a strong swimmer couldn't counteract the panic that Mr. Doe must have felt.

This drowning will, or course, re-emphasize water safety efforts around Lake Discovery, especially with the Fourth of July weekend nearly here. More safety banners, and posters will be hung at all recreation areas, and more coloring books and handouts will be

available to the public. The COE and State Water Commission will be at Lake Beach Fourth of July weekend (as well as other weekends throughout the summer) giving water safety programs and handing out materials. All swim beaches at campgrounds and day use areas have life jacket loaner stations, and COE staff will be discussing adding an additional station at the Lake 50 Boat Ramp. Permanent signs at the boat beach at Lake Beach Day Use Area will also be helpful, as there seems to be lack of safety information in the area.

However, these are the same things we've always done, and more strongly worded tips and emotionally appealing messages are in order if we are going to change the adult frame of mind. Scaring our visitors is obviously not what we want to accomplish, but perhaps a bit of shock value is underrated. The cartoon-like water safety posters that the COE National Water Safety Program produces are fantastic for appealing to children, but not to their parents. As for specific messages to grab an adult's attention, I don't have them yet. Now that we have realized a problem though, Lake Discovery staff will be working to come up with new ways of reaching a broader audience.

Rodney Ranger
Lake Discovery