

Potomac Valley Swimming Safety Committee

Safety Reminder – Use of Starting Blocks in Practice

Practice routines utilized by a number of clubs have the risk of serious injury to swimmers. One such routine involves the combination of two-directional swimming in the same lane and practicing starts from the blocks.

During swim practice, it is common for coaches to have swimmers going two directions in one lane. This allows coaches to use their lane space efficiently with more swimmers in each lane. Swimmers make this work by staying on one side of the lane, allowing other swimmers to pass on the other side.

It is also common for coaches to have swimmers practice starts from the blocks. This is safe when the lane space in front of the blocks is clear of other swimmers and the water depth is adequate.

Practicing starts when there are other swimmers in the same lane coming into the blocks is not safe. Some swimmers may not be able to consistently place their dives to assure that they enter the water at the required side of the lane. And the potential injury is much greater than when two swimmers collide while swimming past each other in the same lane. The additional momentum of the diving action increases the likelihood of serious injury when there is a collision.

Coaches are encouraged to examine their practice routines to eliminate this and other risks of injury. Besides the injury itself, unsafe practices can result in law suits against the pool facility, the swim club and the individual coach.

October 11, 2007
Peter Nichols
PVS Safety Chair