

Safety Tip of the Month - March 2006
VSI Safety Committee

“When the Lights Go Out”

Proper illumination of the swimming meet facility is essential for safe swimming competition. There are still a number of natatoriums that, even during the day when the sun is high in the sky, the lighting within the immediate pool area is poor. However, regardless of the amount of ambient sunlight in an indoor pool venue, a sudden electrical outage can wreak havoc on the swimmers, coaches, and officials.

Per the USA Swimming 2006 Rules, Article 103.10; Lighting within the pool venue should consist of a “minimum of 100 foot candle illumination over the entire course’s water surface.”

When the lights suddenly go out, the first priority is for the safety of the swimmers in the water. Stroke and Turn officials should watch their jurisdiction for swimmer safety, and be prepared to put their hand at end of pool to cushion a swimmer’s head, if the swimmer could not see the backstroke flags during such stroke. Flashlights should be on the deck, and the Marshals or other parties designated by the Meet Referee / Meet Director should hold the flashlights over the water. As soon as the race is over, the swimmers should exit the pool and the timers may be released for several minutes, during the analysis of the electrical outage. The Meet Director and Facility personnel should assure that the exit signs are working both in the pool venue and in the spectator area. Additional flashlights or portable electric lanterns should be placed on the deck.

If there appears to be enough ambient light to proceed, the Meet Referee should convene a brief coaches meeting, stating her / his decision to proceed and the conditions under which the meet will be conducted during the electrical outage. Equal lighting should prevail across the swimming course. The Meet Referee may opt to just run 4 or 6 lanes of a larger venue, based on the better distribution of light in this area. The meet should be run a bit slower, with great caution on the dive over starts. Any child who states she / he did not see the wall or other landmarks, despite the changes made with some temporary lighting in the venue, should be given the option for that session to reswim the event.

Since the ventilation system will be off, the air temperature may become cooler or warmer, depending on the season. The pool outside doors may need to be opened a bit to bring in some natural ventilation. If an emergency generator is set up to run temporary lights, it is imperative that the generator is outside, and that the exhaust fumes are directed as far away from the pool exits as possible.

Okay, now take your team through an imaginary drill. If the lights in your pool go out right now, are you ready?