



Jack Reynolds

KEEP IT UP: Training by doing, the Surf City Beach Patrol get their feet wet, and more Saturday, in the techniques of rescue. Here, lifeguards are practicing the circular search pattern for a missing swimmer.

Lifeguards Drill for Just About Anything

Training By Total Immersion: Surf City Beach Patrol Practices Rescue

By MARIA SCANDALE

Behind the scenes of a day at the beach are the hours of first aid training for lifeguards in advance of the season. Last weekend, Surf City guards took a three-day course in preparation for beaches opening there June 18.

"If somebody's on the beach and gets injured, they go right to the lifeguard and ask what to do," said Mark DiLeo, Surf City Beach Patrol captain since 1992 and a guard since 1984. "The guards have to know what to do. I do everything I can to make sure these kids learn it before they go out on the beach, and they also get drilled all summer."

Sprains, scuba mishaps, sun-strokes, embedded hooks, jellyfish stings — all could clash with the sun and fun of summer, and guards must be prepared to be first responders.

"This training is above and beyond the normal first aid and CPR training," said DiLeo, who is an American Heart Association-certified instructor.

On Saturday, the Surf City guards were taking specific training in how to treat spinal injuries. "They're not very common, but we train for every eventuality that could happen," DiLeo explained.

Instruction included response to a number of scenarios. "What happens if a child walks up to you who's been boogie boarding and gets thrown into the sand and says, 'My neck hurts'?" posed the captain.

"What's the appropriate response for the lifeguard to make sure he or she doesn't exacerbate the problem?"

The training included how to stabilize a victim to prevent head movement, and how to get a person out of the surf in the safest possible manner, as well as "how to recognize the signs and symptoms of spinal injuries — signs being like a bruise on the head, or symptoms, like somebody saying, 'My vision is blurry' or 'I feel nauseated.'"

Later on Saturday, the program covered rescue breathing in the water, and search patterns for missing swimmers. "If, God forbid, we lost somebody, there's a circular search pattern and a grid search pattern," DiLeo summed up to reporters after the classes. "That hasn't had to occur in 20 years that I know of, but lifeguards need to know how to do that."

On Sunday, one course topic covered what the guards should do if they see a scuba diver in trouble. "If you see a lone scuba diver, that could mean there's a problem," DiLeo instructed. "Where's the buddy?"

"And tonight," he said Monday, "we're meeting at the firehouse to talk about how to work with our local emergency rescue squad." If an injury occurs on the beach, the beach patrol and the rescue squad need to communicate effectively. So, DiLeo wanted to do a run-through on what kind of information both groups need from each other.

"What information do they want

when they come to the beach; how to make the call to the ambulance; how best to make the process efficient in integrating the two services," he outlined. "I like to have the two squads interact and know each other and know what to expect of each other."

Thankfully, most beach injuries are not dire. "There's a lot of sprained ankles — people just come out of the water and hit some soft sand or turn the wrong way," said DiLeo. Being trained to handle many other eventualities is required not only by the borough, but by national standards. Surf City has U.S. Lifeguard Association national certification.

"That national certification requires all this training," DiLeo said.

On June 18, Surf City will open its ocean beaches and the bay beach seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The squad has 31 lifeguards, two lieutenants and a captain.

DiLeo was pleased this week with the way training was going. "I have a great crew. They're good kids. You can tell when they all show up to a training and they're attentive when they're going through all the drills. A lot of that comes from following the older guards."

The average age of the guards is about 19 or 20, with 16 being the youngest age hired. "We'll get four or five 16-year-olds, and in four years, they're my experienced 20-year-old guys who know it inside and out," the veteran lifeguard added.

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