

NSSIA Surf Rescue Guidelines for Instructors

(Based on Australian Rescue Techniques)

In the case of surf instructors, situations with swimmers often take place while lessons are being given. Normally rips often result in swimmers being carried outside the shallow areas and into the surf zone. If lifeguards are not available, particularly in early morning hours, the instructor might be the only person available to attempt a rescue.



Surf rescue is the second most important skill taught to surf lifesavers and a skill all surf instructors should know. There are number of effective techniques that have been developed for successfully rescuing swimmers from the ocean.

The ocean is constantly changing. To determine the best method to use in a given scenario, the lifesaver must carefully assess the prevailing conditions and risks involved. Factors to consider include the surf conditions, equipment available, swimmer's condition, and rescuer's fitness and skill.

Rescues involving breaking waves can be particularly difficult and critical. At any time during the rescue, so lifesavers should always try to get assistance if possible.

The following rescue techniques are the preferred methods in use today on Australian beaches. If standard equipment is unavailable, then any floating item (bodyboard, surfboard) should be used as a rescue aid, rather than an unaided rescue attempt.



Rescue tubes (with optional flippers) are usually found around the patrol shelter or at predetermined points along the beach. They may also be stored on the beach or on a beach patrol vehicle (ATV), and may be carried by walking lifesavers on a roving patrol.

Rescue tubes are flexible yellow strips of foam, approximately one meter long, attached to a long cord and a belt or harness. The cord is

rolled up in a manner that allows the belt and board to be pulled away and unrolled quickly in an emergency.

In a rescue scenario, the lifesaver places the belt over their head and under one arm in a harness fashion, and then sprints to the ocean holding the tube in one hand. Once the water becomes too deep to run further, the rescuer throws the tube behind them and swims to the patient. If the rescuer wishes to use flippers they should also be worn from this point.

The floating tube is then handed to the patient, who, with additional verbal reassurance from the rescuer, should quickly become less panicked. The tube can then be wrapped around and clipped securely behind the swimmer's back.

The rescue tube is capable of floating two people. If necessary, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation may be performed on an unconscious swimmer, supported by the rescue tube. The rescuer should then swim back to shore, towing the swimmer behind, or wait for additional help if it is on the way. While returning to shore, care is needed to avoid dumping waves and to protect the swimmer from possible spinal injury due to sandbanks and other hazards.

Upon reaching the shore, the patient should be assisted or carried to dry sand and CPR or first aid should be commenced if necessary.

Board Rescue

In the case of a surf instructor, a board rescue is the most preferred method. Unfortunately, if you are giving a lesson, you must get your students safely to shore first before attempting the rescue. Hopefully you are in shallow enough water that you can have your student walk in while you use their board for the rescue.

Traditional rescue boards are large foam or fibreglass boards, similar to a paddleboard, with multiple hand straps along the sides. They provide superior floatation and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation can be more easily performed in the ocean. It is also possible to rescue more than one swimmer at a time. In the case of a mass rescue, boards can keep many patients afloat until additional support arrives.

Boards give the patient more confidence and reassurance than a tube, since once they're on top of the board. They also allow for a much faster return to shore than a rescue tube.

In a rescue scenario, the instructor grabs the nearest board and, if on shore, sprints to the water, and/or paddles to the patient. The rescuer approaches the swimmer from the beach side, so that the rescuer can keep an eye on incoming waves, and to ensure incoming waves don't drive the board onto the swimmer.

The rescuer then sits up towards the rear of the board, asks the swimmer to grab the board and then helps the swimmer climb onto the front of the board. The swimmer should lie face down towards the front of the board. The rescuer should lie down on top of the patient and slightly further back (between the patient's legs). If the swimmer is in panic, keep slightly behind the swimmer to help them onto the board first. If they are unconscious, the rescuer must roll the swimmer onto the board. If more than one swimmer is being rescued, make sure the first swimmer had a good grip on the board so

the second swimmer does not dislodge the first when getting on the board. In some cases, the rescuer may need to stay in the water while moving towards shore.

The rescuer then paddles towards shore. While returning to shore, the rescuer must remain in control and take care not to catch any steep or unbroken waves, lest the board and swimmer become separated. Upon reaching the shore, the swimmer should be assisted or carried to dry sand.

Non-Board Rescue

In all cases approach the drowning victim quickly but with caution. A panicking person may try to grab you and could prevent you from performing. The following drawing depicts the proper technique for controlling a drowning victim.

