



Best Practices for your Polar Plunge

Polar Plunge ® Winter Swimming Fundraising events will be happening coast to coast in the next few months. While this is a great fundraising activity, we have had an increase in the number of injuries at these events over the past two years. In two separate incidents, the participants took head-first dives into shallow water and sustained injuries to the head and/or neck. Fortunately, these incidents did not result in catastrophic injuries. We encourage each US Program to review the following risk management recommendations and implement these recommendations at all of its Polar Plunge Winter Swimming Fundraising events.

Risk Management Recommendations:

- Do not provide alcohol at the event BEFORE the “jump” – this includes not opening alcohol distribution points prior to participants entering the water regardless of whether or not Special Olympics or the event host is serving the alcohol. For example, if the event is held at a bar, request that alcohol not be served to plunge participants until after the event. Notify participants that they are advised not to plunge after drinking alcohol.
- Make sure you have sufficient personnel, including law enforcement, at the entrances to the event and/or water so that only registered participants are allowed in the water.
- Notify participants at the outset of the event and provide ongoing reminders that diving or flipping into the pool/body of water is prohibited. This applies to plunges where participants run into a body of water, jump into a pool (shallow or deep) or jump into a deep body of water.
- Each participant should sign a release of liability waiver prior to participating in the event, which releases the US Program AND SOI from losses arising from the participant's participation in the event. Please remember that American Specialty is available to review your Program's release of liability waiver from a risk management/insurance perspective. If your release does not include SOI, then the SOCIP policies are still at risk as if you had no signed release.
- Have emergency medical personnel on-site during the event.
- Develop a plan to ensure that you know that each participant who enters the water, safely exits the water.

- If the event is in a natural body of water (as opposed to a pool), Programs should consider having rescue divers in the water during the plunge. In addition to being ready to search for a missing participant, the divers can assist with ensuring that participants do not leave the area designated for this event (in the water).
- If the participants/volunteers/spectators have to walk on frozen water to get to the plunge site, have outside experts determine that the ice is thick enough for the weight of the participants, volunteers, spectators and any equipment needed for the event. One method is to work with local DNR or a similar entity to ensure the ice is safe for the event. Please remember to reevaluate the condition of the ice throughout the event.
- If hot tubs are going to be available following the plunge, please ensure the manufacturer's safety guidelines are visible and that participants are aware of such safety recommendations. Additionally, Programs will need to ensure that the chemical levels for the hot tub are in line with the manufacturer's recommendation and that any extra chemicals are stored in a secured location. Don't forget to reevaluate the chemical levels throughout the event.
- If participants will be "plunging" into a pool (as opposed to a natural body of water) or if hot tubs are used, there needs to be a plan in place to ensure that the ladders, decks, etc. that are used to enter and exit the pool and/or hot tub do not become slippery or covered in ice during the event.
- If space heaters (or other heating devices) are going to be used at your event, ensure that the heaters are in a location where participants, volunteers and spectators are not able to stand over or too close to the heater. Programs may consider having volunteers posted at the location of the heating device to ensure that participants do not get too close and/or use covers that the manufacturer recommends to help prevent participants from burning themselves.
- Develop a crisis management plan for the event and ensure that volunteers and employees are familiar with it. This plan should include procedures for locating a missing participant, responding to an injured participant, contacting emergency personnel (if needed), communicating with the injured party following an accident (both on site and later at the hospital or other health care facility), dealing with media inquiries following an accident, reporting the incident to American Specialty and plans for cancelling the event in case of inclement weather.
- If participants are permitted to wear costumes during the event, participants should be reminded that costumes need to be appropriate and non-discriminatory.