



US Army Corps
of Engineers®

Forever 15

Tragedy on the Water

Part 1: Foreword

Each year, there are over 357 million visitors to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' recreation areas. There are 422 lakes in 43 states, with over 55,000 miles of shoreline. Public safety at Corps lakes is of the highest priority, and the Corps is making great progress in its water safety efforts. By focusing on education and enforcement, the Corps has made it a primary goal to provide the public with safe and healthful recreational opportunities.

Between 1998 and 2007, there were 1,643 water related fatalities on Corps lakes. Half of those were under the age of 30. Historically, the Corps' water safety message targeted young children, ages 5 - 12. While we still feel this is an important demographic to reach out to with a water safety message, our data shows that a large percentage of drownings occur in the 15 - 24 year old age group. This is a difficult audience to reach with a water safety message because they are greatly influenced by peer pressure, and base decisions on fitting in, rather than by what is the smart, safe choice.

As an agency, the Corps has struggled to develop a program to reach this audience, and to deliver an *effective* water safety message to them. We feel that many young adults truly are unaware of the dangers they face when they swim or wade in the lake. Unfortunately, in many instances, this lack of awareness continues up until the moment it's too late, and a tragedy occurs. In light of that, we have developed a hard-hitting, realistic program which we feel will provide eye-opening information to these young adults.

Part 2: Acknowledgements

This program is a major undertaking, and cannot be successfully executed without the partnership of a multitude of other agencies. Partnering agencies include:

- Air Evac
- Lorena ISD Middle School
- City of Waco
 - Fire Department
 - Police Department
 - Radio Shop
- Doris Miller YMCA

- East Texas Medical Center EMS
- Heart of Texas Regional Advisory Council
- Lakeshore Funeral Home
- McLennan County Emergency Management
- McLennan County Justice of the Peace
- Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Waco ISD
- Woodway Department of Public Safety

Part 3: The Program

Selection of Actors

The principal or other designated school official should select students to be the “actors”. The students should be popular, well liked, well known, but also well behaved. They will have to be trusted to keep quiet about the program, because not knowing what to expect on the day of the event will significantly increase the impact of the program. Typically, a group of 8-10 students will be selected to participate.

Parent/Student Meeting

After actors have been selected, a meeting will be arranged with the students and their parents. The principal (or school official who will be coordinating the event), and at least one counselor should also be present. **This meeting is mandatory.** If a student or parent cannot attend, they may not participate.

Goals of the Parent/Student Meeting:

- Provide an orientation of the program as to purpose, requirements, and schedule of activities
- Complete all administrative forms
- Parents and students create mock obituary together
- Provide parents and students with a thorough understanding of the program and their responsibilities
- Encourage discussion between students and parents about water safety, peer pressure, and decision making
- Choose a date(s) for swimming ability test(s)
- Discuss swimming ability test, and go through the specifics of it
 - Ask students and parents how good of a swimmer they perceive themselves to be
 - Most people overestimate their swimming ability, and this can lead to drowning or near drowning
 - Often, people who were good swimmers as a youth, lose endurance as they get older
 - Encourage parents AND children to participate in swim evaluation

- Swim evaluation is MANDATORY for any students or parents who will enter the water during the pre-filming or at the event
 - Go through the specifics of the swimming ability test
 - 50-meter non-stop swim
 - 10-minute tread
 - Swim underwater to bottom of pool and pick up brick, bring brick to the surface, bring the brick to edge of pool
 - Rehearse the mock drowning
 - Swim evaluation will take place in the controlled environment of a swimming pool, with lifeguards on duty (Doris Miller YMCA, Waco)
 - “Victim” will be chosen based on swimming ability and attitude
- Counselor will be on hand to deal with any emotional issues during the obituary portion of the meeting
- Additional pool sessions may be scheduled, if necessary.

Pre-Filming

Safety

The pre-filming will be done by Waco ISD film school students, supervised by Mr. Bill Taverner. It will be done on location, at Twin Bridges Park. Prior to students entering the water, there will be no less than the following on standby:

- Waco Fire Department Water Rescue boat with 3 personnel
- 3 YMCA certified lifeguards (1 on shore, 2 in boat)

All rescue personnel above will be staged just outside of the film view, and will be prepared for rapid deployment in the event of an actual emergency during filming.

Events (will be edited into a 3-5 min video)

Students (boys and girls) are at the lake, and are playing catch with a football, and sunning on the shore of the lake. They are not in a designated swimming area, and there are no personal flotation devices at their location. The parents of the kids are at the park as well, enjoying a barbeque at a picnic site, while the kids are playing by the water. It is a warm day, and the kids decide to enter the water. They are splashing and having fun and several of the boys are getting farther from shore and into deeper water. They continue to play and dunk one another and horse around. One of the boys begins to cajole another into racing to a distant buoy. He is hesitant at first, but finally gives in to peer pressure. They take off swimming toward the buoy. One of the boys gains a considerable lead, and the other falls behind about halfway to the buoy. The one in the rear begins to quietly struggle in the water, and turns back toward shore. He swims a short distance and then begins to tread water and not making forward motion. He goes underwater once, and comes back up and yells for help. No one is close enough to

assist, and the lead swimmer doesn't realize there's a problem. The boy goes under again, and doesn't come up. Kids on the shore begin to scream and the lead swimmer comes back to look for the missing boy. He dives underwater, but without success. Student on shore makes 9-1-1 call. Parents run to the water's edge, and may enter the water to assist with a search.

The Event

The student actors who participated in the filming of the event will not be at school this day. The students will know a field trip is pending, but ideally, they will not be aware of the particulars of the event. Several certified lifeguards will be mingled with the crowd playing the role of bystanders to ensure the safety of the students. Counselors will be on scene as well, as the events are very life-like and emotional support may be necessary. School officials will try to identify any students or staff which may be particularly sensitive to a mock-drowning scenario ahead of time to prevent any unnecessary emotional distress.

- Students will view the 3-5 minute video of the drowning event at the school
- A frantic 9-1-1 call from one of their fellow students will be broadcast over the school PA system.
 - Caller will hysterically state that his/her friend went under water and didn't come up, and to please hurry
- Students immediately load buses and drive to Airport Beach Park
 - While en route to park, buses are passed by emergency responders running code
 - Once at the park, students gather to watch the emergency operations
 - Emergency responders continue to arrive by land and by water
 - 2 fire department boats
 - Fire Truck (engine)
 - Game Warden boat
 - Game Warden truck
 - Several Waco PD vehicles
 - ETMC ambulance
 - Park Ranger boat and vehicles
 - Helicopter
 - Fire Department/Game Wardens establishes command of the incident
 - All radio traffic is run thru a PA system set up on location so the students can hear what is being said
 - Lots of activity going on around them to keep them engaged
 - Dragging operations begin
 - Divers enter the water
 - Game Warden/Waco PD begin interviewing witnesses (student actors) and taking statements

- Media shows up as if it is a real incident and conduct interviews
 - Victim's parents/siblings/friends show up and are very emotional
 - Asking the kids that are there what happened
- If helicopter is on scene, command will release it when it is apparent there will be no need to transport (stated over radio so that students know)
- Recovery operations continue for around 30 minutes
- Justice of the Peace arrives on scene
- Divers "find" victim and this is announced over the PA
 - Victim will be aboard a rescue boat the whole time, and will remain low and out of sight
 - Victim will have been airbrushed with paint to make him look deceased
 - At the appropriate time, he will slip off the boat through a dive door or off the back of the boat out of sight of students
 - He will remain out of sight until the diver has a hold on him
 - Diver will swim the victim to a rescue boat, making sure he is in plain view of the students on shore while doing so
 - Diver will hand the victim off to rescuers, and victim will be loaded into the boat
 - It is imperative that victim be limp and remain in character during this process to make it as realistic as possible
- Operations personnel will facilitate moving the group toward pre-determined location where boat will pull ashore
- Once victim is aboard boat, the boat SLOWLY moves toward location, ensuring the group arrives at about the same time
- Boat ties up to shore, body bag laid out on ground, victim laid on body bag
- Parents/siblings view body and are very emotional
- Students observe from the nearby
- Justice of the Peace pronounces the death
- Hearse arrives
- Victim is zipped into body bag, loaded onto stretcher and loaded into hearse
- Hearse leaves
- Students get on buses and go back to school
- All aspects of the event will be video recorded

After the students return to school, they will eat lunch. Counselors will be on site to provide emotional support, if necessary. At 1:00 pm the same day, an assembly will take place at the school. Student actors will not return to school until the time of the assembly.

Student Assembly

This portion is primarily organized by the school. The assembly will take place in an auditorium or similar area where all the students can gather. A responder will re-cap the event, talk briefly about

consequences of decisions, especially around the water, and a somber mood will be kept. A family member of a local drowning victim will speak for 5-10 minutes about the impact the drowning had on them and their family, and what could have been done to prevent the tragedy. She will provide pictures of her son, and will personify him to the students.

Re-introduce the “victim” to the student body.

Student/Parent Debriefing

This portion of the program is an opportunity to discuss what went right, what went wrong, and how to improve it in the future. Student actors, their parents, and school personnel will be invited. It will be held immediately after the memorial concludes.

Planning Committee Debriefing

All members of the planning committee will be invited, as well as emergency responders and volunteers who participated in the event. We will discuss the responses from the students and their parents, and what improvements can be made to the program. The meeting will likely be conducted in the week following the event.

Chapter 1 Getting the Message Out

The event itself will reach only a small part of our intended audience. We feel strongly that this message is important enough that it should reach as far and wide as possible. To facilitate this, the footage will be edited into a short video, and posted on YouTube. CDs of the event will be distributed to all participants and sponsors. Posters and banners will be developed with the **Forever 15** graphic, and the YouTube address will be across the bottom. A smart phone barcode will be incorporated into the posters as well. Posters will be distributed to all the area schools for display, and to other receptive locations (YMCA, hospitals, retail stores, mall, churches, libraries...etc.) Banners will be put up at park entrances and other high visibility locations, and possibly on a roadway billboard(s).

For more information, please contact the following:

Elizabeth Anderson or Randall McCartney
Park Rangers, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Waco Lake Project Office
3801 Zoo Park Drive
Waco, TX 76708
(254) 756-5359

Teams:

Operations	Water Rescue	Assembly (BISD)	Parent/Student Workshop	Public Relations	Impact Team (BISD)
E. Anderson	L. Denman	J. Ingram	R. McCartney	P. Swanton	J. Ingram
R. McCartney	B. Witt	B. Shehorn	E. Anderson	S. Anderson	
J. Wilhelm	W. Hitch		J. Wilhelm	E. Rivera	
P. Swanton	E. Bates		C. Reeves		
C. Reeves			A. Carpenter		