

Swim England Safety Guidance

GUIDE TO LANE MANAGEMENT

A Frequently Asked Question posed by swimming clubs is “How many swimmers can a club have in a lane?” This is a simplistic question that does not have a simple answer. As required by legislation the answer to the question must be determined by a risk assessment process and the resulting decision and operational practice must be included in the PSOP (Pool Safety Operating Procedures).

Aspects to consider in the risk assessment process

- ▶ **How wide is the lane in question?** Most swimming pool lanes in the UK are 2-metres wide but FINA Rules for international events require a 2.5-metre wide lane, so several of the major pools in the UK have these wider lanes. Whichever, a lane of 2+-metres is sufficient for swimmers to swim in a circular motion whilst training, but only under certain conditions?
- ▶ **What size are the swimmers?** Rather than asking what age the swimmers are it is obviously more relevant to consider the size of the swimmers. Children below the age of 13-14 years are much more capable of being placed in a lane swimming in a circular manner and more swimmers can be accommodated in the lane without fear of collision because they are smaller and lighter than adults.
- ▶ **How capable are the swimmers?** The faster the swimmers the more likely collisions may occur. Mixed ability in the same lane also increases the risk of collision.
- ▶ **What stroke are the swimmers doing?** Clearly it is hazardous to mix strokes in the same lane. Strokes that do not require a wide arm propulsion motion i.e. front and back crawl, can allow swimming a circular training routine within the lane without undue likelihood of collision; whereas strokes with wide arm propulsion techniques i.e. fly and breaststroke inhibit swimming in a circular training routine except only in the widest lanes (2.5-metres) and even then not adult/large swimmers.

These issues must be considered and applied to the training sessions or class being risk assessed to determine:

1. How many swimmers can be in the lane, and
2. Can the training session or fitness swim being permitted be a circular swim within a lane, or must it be linear with the return in another lane or by exiting the pool and walking back.

It should be emphasized that this process primarily applies to programmed club swimming and to a lesser extent swimming lessons.

Although a similar issue applies to public sessions in a public swim environment there is no control over what strokes swimmers chose to adopt in lanes set aside for lane fitness swimming and casual swimming. It is therefore possible for a lane to contain swimmers swimming different strokes at different speeds etc. For further advice on un-programmed swimming in lanes it is advised to consult The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) guidance note - **296–Lanes**