



# Open Water Officials Clinic

**Certification Training for:  
Open Water Judge  
Open Water Referee**

Revision 04

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**...but first**

**OPEN WATER**



**...a swimmer's perspective**



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# Objectives

- Provide a *safe and competitive venue* for open water swimming
- Promote an *approach and organization* at USA Swimming Open Water meets consistent with other LSCs and National events
- Training for officials *specific to open water swimming*
- Provide an officials *certification process*



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# Clinic Contents

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# OW Introduction



- Wetsuits optional at 20C (68F) and mandatory at 18C (64.4F).
- Team Events with various formats.
- Freestyle events.
- Meet info includes course abandonment and races escorted or unescorted.
- Starts: [1] in-water; [2] from beach with run into water; [3] from fixed platform.
- Each swimmer numbered on the body.
- Timing until event limit is reached.
- Officials positioned along course on land and watercraft.



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# Certification Process - OW Judge

1. Current NCS Certified Official **and/or** USAS membership, Background Check, Athlete Protection Training, and Concussion Protocol Training.
2. Complete USAS OW Judge Test with 80% or better.
3. Apprentice:
  - a) Current NCS: ST, SR, or DR must be observed in one OW meet.
  - b) Not currently certified NCS must be observed in two OW meets.
  - c) OW MR to notify Officials Chair of status.
4. Certification valid for three years.



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# USA Swimming Certification Testing

- Two certification tests:
  - Open Water Judge
    - (OTS Code: OWJ)
  - Open Water Referee
    - (OTS Code: OWR)



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# Safety

## *Safety is the paramount concern*

- Sanction must be approved by the Zone and then the LSC for all events.
- Host Committee develops the safety plan per the sanction application.
- The authority to stop a race for safety concerns can be made at any time either by the :
  - Referee
  - Meet Director
  - Independent Safety Monitor



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# Event Rules

The Host Committee includes in the meet announcement:

- Policy for abandonment.
- Escorted or Unescorted swims:
  - Escorted: each swimmer with observance
  - Unescorted: swimmers observed by zones



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# Open Water Sanction

- Required sanction format available at USAS website
- Format requirements include:
  - Key personnel
  - Emergency Response Plan
  - Course Abandonment Plan
  - Independent Safety Monitor
  - Water quality
  - Map of the course



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# Roles and Duties (1)

- Meet Director
  - Primary contact for general meet activities.
  - Determines the course.
  - Authority to withdraw the sanction due to safety concerns.
  - **Stop a race at any time for safety concerns.**



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# Roles and Duties (2)

- ISM (Independent Safety Monitor)
  - Approved by the LSC Sanction Chair.
  - Independent of event management: may supersede activities in the interest of safety.
  - Assures the safety plan is implemented and deployed.
  - **Withdraw sanction or stop a race for any time for safety concerns.**
  - Attends and supervises all elements of safety including:
    - Support resources (people, vehicles and equipment).
    - Environment for swimmers and attendees.
  - Has contact with all areas of the event via dedicated radio.



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# Roles and Duties (3)

- Officials:
  - Referee\*
  - Assistance Referee
  - Admin Referee
  - Announcer
  - Medical Officer
  - Clerk of Course
  - Chief Timer\* with 3 Timers
  - Recorder
  - Safety Officer\*
  - Starter
  - Chief Finish Judge\*
  - Race Judge (one per swimmer in escorted races)
  - Turn Judge (one at each change in direction)

**\* Dedicated role.  
Not combined with the  
duties with any other  
official.**



# Roles and Duties (4)

- **Referee**
  - Pre-race briefing for all participants, coaches, and event personnel
    - Course, markings, signals.
    - Safety procedures.
  - Authority to withdraw the sanction due to safety concerns.
  - Stop a race at any time for safety concerns.
  - Use of video and other devices to verify order of finish.
  - Signal start status.
  - Authority to start in waves and/or separate by age group or abilities.
- **Assistance Referee**
  - Perform all duties assigned by the Referee.
- **Admin Referee**
  - Responsible for administrative duties.



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# Roles and Duties (5)

- **Safety Officer**

- Responsible to the Referee for all aspects of safety.
- Escort craft suitability and back up.
- Verify safety of start and finish.
- Provide information to participants on tides and currents conditions.
- Liaison to the Medical Officer and updates Referee on any safety issues including course revisions.

- **Medical Officer**

- Responsible to the Referee for all medical aspects.
- Informs local medical support of the event and evacuation process.
- Advise the Referee, with the Safety Officer of unsafe conditions.



# Roles and Duties (6)

- Course Officer
  - Responsible for the course survey.
  - Verify course layout is ready for use.
  - Insure Turn Judges are in position.
  - Serve as pilot in the lead boat, when used.
- Clerk of Course
  - Assembles and instructs competitors prior to the start and at the finish.
  - Verifies that competitors are properly marked and fingernails and toenails are trimmed, and no jewelry is worn, **including no watches.**
  - Inform competitors and officials of time intervals between event sessions including one minutes intervals during the last five minutes to start.





# Roles and Duties (7)

- Starter
  - Assume position clearly visible to all competitors.
  - On signal from the Referee, raise a distinctive flag to a vertical position.
  - To start, bring the flag down while activating and audible signal.
  - When starting from a fixed platform, verify swimmers have at least one foot forward, and stationary for the command of “take your mark”.
- Race Judge
  - Positioned in boat to observe assigned swimmer at all times with violations recorded and reported to the Referee.
  - Authority to remove a swimmer when the event expires.
  - Maintain clearance between swimmers.
  - Alert the Referee of any withdrawals.
  - Immediately report rules infractions to the Referee.



# Roles and Duties (7)

- Turn Judge
  - Positioned to verify swimmer compliance at turns.
  - Record and report infractions to the Referee.
- Chief Timer
  - Brief and assign Timers to positions.
  - Maintain and synchronize to the official clock.
- Chief Finish Judge
  - Brief and assign Finish Judges to positions.
  - Determine order of finish and forward to Referee.
- Finish Judge
  - Records order of finish of swimmers.
- Recorder
  - Completes finish information including order of finish, withdrawals, and individual and team results.



# Venue Standards

- Markers
  - All Markers will be communicated in meet information and pre-race instructions.
  - Turn buoys are of distinctive color and will be turned by the swimmer.
    - Recommend one color for right turns, another color for left turns.
  - Guide buoys are supplemental, non-directional and different color from turn buoys.
    - Assist the participant to remain on course.
  - Additional buoys used for:
    - Finish line management to outline the chute.
    - Hazards (stay clear).
    - Out of Bounds (warm down area).



# Venue Standards (2)

- Fresh water or salt water.
- Except at start and finish, minimum depth of 1.4 m (4.6 ft).
- Water/Air Temperature:
  - Water temperature not less than 16C (60.8F).
  - Races of 5k and more, water temperature no greater than 29.5C (85F).
- Air and Water temperatures added together not less than 30C (118F) and not greater than 63C (177F) .
- Water Quality:
  - Meets standards of the local testing authority.
  - If heavy rains or flooding have affected the water quality, the Referee may postpone the meet



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# Swimmer Markings

- Swimmer Marking
  - Vertically on each arm.
  - Horizontally on each back shoulder.
  - On each wrist (to support video at touch finish).
  - Referee may specify revised or additional markings.
- Markings are used to identify the participants
  - During the swim.
    - For infractions, safety, coach contacts.
  - At the finish.
    - Order of finish.



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# Start/Finish

- Starts
  - In water or platform.
  - In water may require waves.
  - Platform with depth requirements per USAS 1.3.2.3.
  - **No running starts.**
- Finish
  - Defined finish area with “chute” approach in water or exiting.
  - When timing chips are used the Timers recorded time will be the official time.
  - Actual finish placement will be determined by the manual finish judging and/or video replay if needed.



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# Feeding Stations

## Required for events greater than 5K:

- One station for events greater than 5K and less than 10K.
- For events 10K or longer, at least one station every 2K.
- Stations may be floating (anchored) or stationary.
- Stations located on the inner or outer boundary of the course in line with the turn buoy.
- Team support on the station assigned by lots.



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# Rules Summary (1)

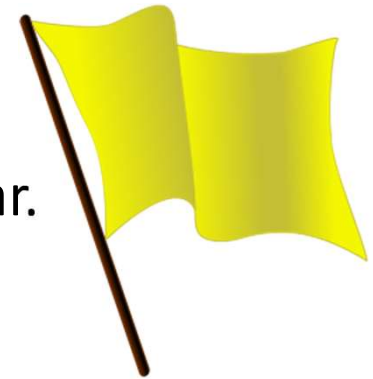
- Open water is a free style event.
- Red Flag Disqualifications – Removal from Competition:
  - Two yellow flags (the second is a red flag).
  - Failing to finish the course.
  - Receiving assistance (pulling on cables, markers).
  - Receiving propulsion aid.
  - Walking or pushing off the bottom.
  - Receiving support from fixed or floating objects (intentionally contacting a vessel).
  - Unsporting conduct including intentionally striking another swimmer, refusing to correct a turn, intentional interference at the finish.
  - Swimwear violation including illegal suit or flotation (more than two caps).





# Rules Summary (2)

- Yellow Flag Caution:
  - Gaining an unfair advantage at the start (may escalate to red flag).
  - Receiving pacing.
  - Slipstreaming escort craft; refusal to swim clear.
  - Swimmer's escort intentionally interferes with another competitor.
  - Intentional contact or interference with another swimmer.
- Swimmer Notification:
  - Referee or designate will display the appropriate flag and card with swimmer's number.
  - Whistle notification may be used.
  - Swimmer does not have to acknowledge.



# Rules Summary (3)



- Swimmer Disqualification:
  - When a swimmer receives a red flag disqualification the swimmer must leave the water immediately.
  - Admin Referee is notified of swimmer's status.



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# Ruling Example (1a)

- Situation: In a 1 mile straight away race, the Referee observes swimmer #77 swimming butterfly with an alternating kick. **What action should the Official take?**



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# Ruling Example (1b)

- Situation: In a 1 mile straight away race, the Referee observes swimmer #77 swimming butterfly with an alternating kick. What action should the Referee take?
- **Response: The Official should do nothing – Open Water Swimming events are freestyle events and the swimmer may swim in any manner desired.**



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# Ruling Example (2a)

- Situation: In a 5K race, the feet of swimmer #9 made intentional contact with goggles of swimmer #3 (who is swimming directly behind swimmer #9) causing the goggles to fill with water. The Official observed the contact.

**What actions should the Official take?**



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# Ruling Example (2b)

- Situation: In a 5K race, the feet of swimmer #9 made intentional contact with goggles of swimmer #3 (who is swimming directly behind swimmer #9) causing the goggles to fill with water. The Judge observed the contact. What actions should the Judge take?
- **Response: Recommend to the Referee to immediately give a yellow flag caution to swimmer #9 for intentional contact which causes interference.**



# Ruling Example (3a)

- Situation: A swimmer appears to be having difficulty. The safety craft approaches the swimmer. The swimmer states that he does not think he can finish the race and reaches up and grabs the edge of the craft. The swimmer's coach shouts encouragement to continue. The swimmer lets go of the craft and resumes swimming. **What action should the Official take?**



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# Ruling Example (3b)

- Situation: A swimmer appears to be having difficulty. The safety craft approaches the swimmer. The swimmer states that he does not think he can finish the race and reaches up and grabs the edge of the craft. The swimmer's coach shouts encouragement to continue. The swimmer lets go of the craft and resumes swimming. What action should the Judge take?
- **Response: The Judge recommends the Referee gives a red flag disqualification to the swimmer for touching the craft.**







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