

Risk Control BULLETIN

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Canal Safety Warning Signs

It seems that every year, especially during the hot summer season, the JPIA gets at least one claim of someone drowning in a canal. When this happens and the lawsuit arrives, which it almost invariably does, the basis of the claim is failure to warn. Simply, there were no or inadequate warning signs posted.

When JPIA Risk Management Consultants visit usually once or twice a year, this is one of the items they focus on. This should also be an item checked when agencies do self-inspections of all facilities, no matter how remote.

Most agencies do post signs, but they are frequently stolen, faded, have graffiti, or are used for target practice. This occurs so frequently that some agencies may stop putting them up. Sometimes we hear the argument that they don't actually stop unauthorized persons from entering or vandalizing the facilities.

Not only is the presence and adequate number of signs important, but the wording is important too. It should be as specific as possible regarding the existing hazard. "Danger-Keep Out" is okay, but "Danger Drowning Hazard" is better, and "Danger Swift Moving Water-Drowning Hazard" or "Danger-Underwater Hazard" (if applicable) is even better. Otherwise, it can be argued that the wording was too vague and confusing.

Once signs are put up, they must be maintained, no matter how often they get vandalized. Once a sign is put up, it indicates an acknowledgement that a hazard exists, but you are just too busy with other operations to maintain them.



The more frequent the signs, and the more specific the wording, the more defensible it is in court. And don't think just putting no signs out at all, so as not to admit knowledge of a hazard, is a good defense either. On the witness stand, for an experienced water industry worker to state that he had no knowledge of the danger of drowning in canals, a well known and publicized hazard, comes across as very disingenuous.

Regarding the argument about the effectiveness of single language vs. multi-language, the more languages on the sign, the less it can be argued that it was misunderstood. Al-

so, additional icons, showing a person falling into water (for example), also aids in communicating the hazard of drowning.

The importance of maintaining adequate signage is not just for drowning in canals. The same issue applies for **any** hazard at your facilities. This includes, but is not limited to: electrical hazards, chemical hazards, moving/rotating equipment, equipment that automatically starts, fall hazards, razor wire, and the list goes on.

Maintenance of signs goes along with the maintenance of fences, barbed wire, and other security measures. If you put them up, you must maintain them. Not doing so demonstrates that you don't care, and will likely cost you in a liability settlement.

The JPIA, as part of its Commitment to Excellence, has developed several best practices for canal safety that includes proper signage. These can be found on the JPIA's website at www.acwajpia.com. Many agencies have developed their own best practices to overcome the problems maintaining signage on canals.

Solano Irrigation District came up with an outstanding solution to posting warning and providing notice issue. See the photo below. This warning is painted at regular intervals along the canal.



Some best practices include:

- * Check signage at least annually. This should be an item on regular worksite inspections. Replace signs typically at the beginning of each summer season.
- * Place signs on the north side of structures if possible, to minimize sun fading.
- * Stencil signs on concrete canal banks or other concrete structures. They are less likely to get shot at.
- * Place signs at access points or roads to facilities, at a minimum, preferably more frequently.
- * Place signs inside of fences instead of on the fence, so it's not as easily tagged.
- * Place signs high on poles, so as not to be easily reached.
- * Place signs in the water, also not easily reached (at least when water is present).
- * Place signs on perimeter fencing, at gates, and every 500 feet.
- * Place signs of heavy steel, on heavy posts in concrete, may discourage being stolen.

H.R. LaBounty Safety Awards Program

We are accepting nominations for the fall round of safety awards. You may submit your nomination by completing the nomination form at:

<http://www.acwajpia.com/SafetyAwards.aspx>.

Please email the completed form to tlofing@acwajpia.com. The deadline to submit a nomination is **September 2, 2015**.

Ergonomic Corner

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

No matter what our age, young or not so young, we all can experience an ergonomic injury. As we get older, the risk increases dramatically. We have lost muscle strength, and our tendons and joints have lost some of our natural lubricant. We are more prone to overexertion, tendonitis, back pain, and other repetitive motion injuries. And our doctors always stress the importance of exercise and weight control.

In this section, we often showcase new technology or clever ideas for ergonomic improvements. There are cool chairs with almost infinite adjustability, adjustable workstations and equipment, ergonomically safe tools, assessment tools such as REBA, and RULA highlighted in The Back School CEAS-1 certification training (which JPIA is sponsoring again in August), but some of these are elaborate, time consuming, and may be expensive.

Walking: Walking is an incredibly simple activity to prevent back injury and can be enjoyable. It strengthens our back muscles, and gives us needed cardio vascular (aerobic) exercise. It also provides fresh air, improves our disposition, and may result in moderate weight loss. It also has less impact on our joints than running.

If it seems like a chore to do, here are some ideas to make it as painless as possible:

- * Walk instead of drive (on short excursions).
- * Walk with a friend.

- * Make it a habit to walk in the early morning or evening, or other time we enjoy. It makes it more of a treat, and easier to develop into a habit.
- * Walk in a park or campus to make it more scenic.
- * Park on the far end of the parking lot when shopping, forcing us to walk.
- * Move the coffee pot as far as possible to the other side of the office.
- * Move your printer away from your workstation.
- * Walk to your co-workers office to talk instead of emailing. It is also more personable.
- * Drink lots of water. It's good for our health, and makes us get up and go the bathroom more often.
- * Walk on grass or other uneven terrain. It forces us to lift our legs increasing the effectiveness of the activity.
- * Walk in a hilly area to make it more physically demanding.



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