



COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT FOR INJURY PREVENTION COORDINATORS

Water Safety

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All materials in this toolkit are developed by the American Trauma Society, Pennsylvania Division (ATSPA) and may be adapted with credit for local use.

Toolkit Overview

Purpose: Reduce drowning and water-related injuries through prevention education, behavior change, and community engagement.

This toolkit equips partners with practical communication tools to:

- Increase awareness of poisoning risks
- Promote safe storage and prevention behaviors
- Encourage early action during suspected poisoning
- Reduce stigma surrounding substance-related poisonings
- Connect Pennsylvanians to lifesaving resources

Primary Goals:

- Increase awareness of drowning risks across all ages
- Promote layers of protection (supervision, barriers, life jackets, swim skills)
- Encourage safe behaviors around pools, lakes, and rivers
- Reduce preventable pediatric and adult drowning incidents

Target Audience:

- Parents/caregivers of young children
- Teens & young adults
- Boaters & anglers
- Older adults
- Community organizations & schools

The materials can be adapted for rural, suburban, and urban Pennsylvania communities.

Key Messages

1. Drowning is fast, silent, and preventable
2. Supervision saves lives—always designate a “Water Watcher”
3. Life jackets save lives—especially in open water
4. Swim skills are essential, but not a substitute for supervision
5. Barriers + alarms help prevent unsupervised access to water
6. Alcohol and water activities don’t mix

Messaging Framework

“Layers of Protection” Model:

- Supervision
- Barriers (fences, covers, alarms)
- Life jackets
- Swim lessons
- Emergency preparedness (CPR)

Key Statistics:

- Drowning is a leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1–4
- Most drownings happen quickly and quietly, often in under 2 minutes
- Many incidents occur during non-swim times (unexpected access to water)
- Open water (lakes, rivers) increases risk due to visibility, depth, and currents

Pennsylvania Messaging:

- Pennsylvania has thousands of miles of rivers and streams and thousands of lakes and ponds.
- Pennsylvania waterways can become dangerous quickly due to strong currents, low-head dams, sudden weather changes, cold water temperatures, flooding conditions, limited visibility.
- The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission warns that many dams across Pennsylvania can become “drowning machines” due to recirculating currents.

Outreach Tools

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Sample radio script (15-30 seconds)

15 Seconds

“Summer fun starts with water safety. In Pennsylvania, rivers, lakes, and pools can become dangerous in seconds. Always watch children closely, wear a life jacket, and stay away from dams and fast-moving water. A message from [Organization Name].”

30 Seconds

“Pennsylvania families love spending time on the water—but drowning can happen fast and silently. Whether you’re at the pool, lake, or river, always designate a Water Watcher, keep children within arm’s reach, and wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Remember, rivers and dams can have powerful hidden currents, even when the water looks calm. Stay alert, stay safe, and help prevent drowning this summer. Brought to you by [Organization Name].”

Sample video concepts

“Respect the River”

Scenes:

- Susquehanna River kayaking
- Close-up of current
- Family putting on life jackets

Voiceover: “Pennsylvania waterways are beautiful—but powerful. Respect the river. Wear your life jacket.”

“Silent & Fast”

Scene: Quiet backyard pool

Voiceover: “Drowning is silent. It happens faster than most people realize.”

Text Overlay: “Stay within arm’s reach.”

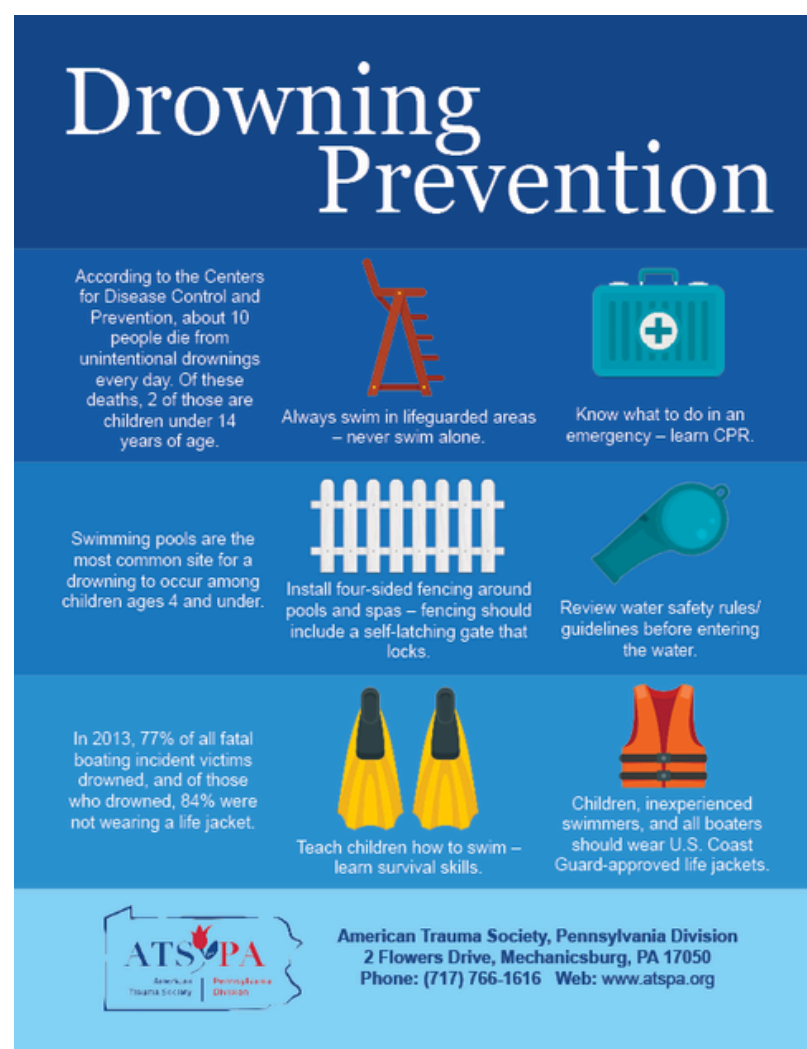
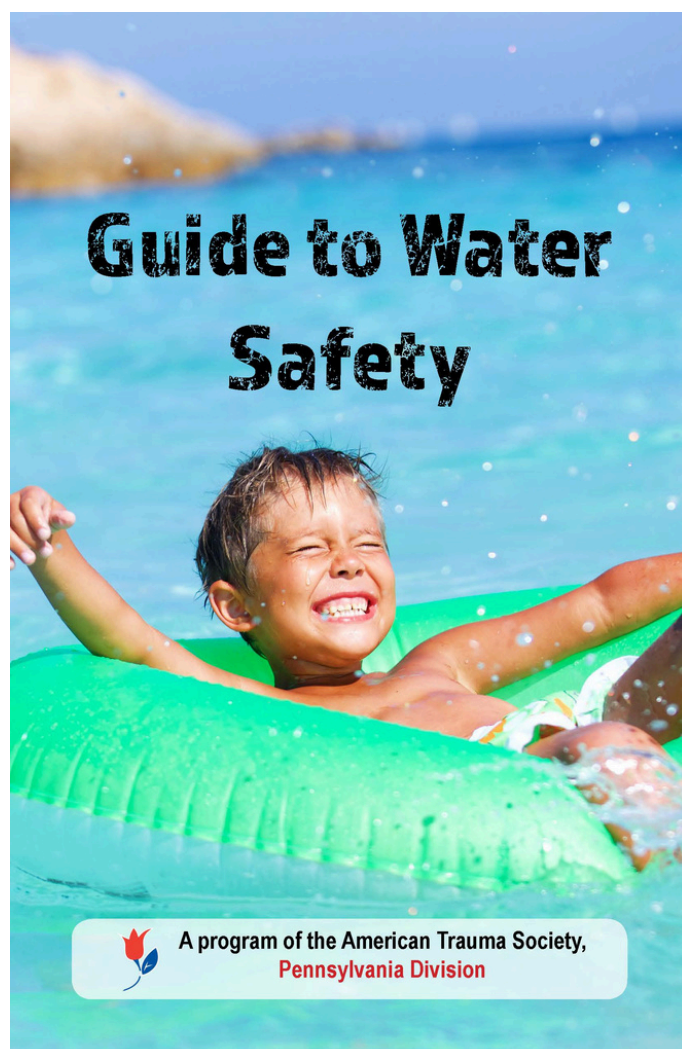
“Danger Below the Dam”

Scene: Drone footage of dam spillway

Voiceover: “The water below a dam can trap and pull people under. Stay back. Stay alive.”

Materials

The ATSPA offers water safety booklets and a drowning prevention flyer to the public for free on our website.



Outreach Tools

Social Media Toolkit

• Post 1:

Life jackets aren't optional—they're lifesaving.
Choose U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets for boating and open water.
#LifeJacketsSaveLives

• Post 2:

Swim lessons save lives—but they don't replace supervision.
Always keep eyes on swimmers.
#LayersOfProtection

• Post 3:

Pool safety starts with barriers:
✓ 4-sided fencing
✓ Self-latching gates
✓ Door alarms
#PoolSafety

• Post 4:

Lakes & rivers aren't pools.
Hidden dangers include:
⚠️ Currents
⚠️ Sudden drop-offs
⚠️ Cold water shock
Be prepared. Wear a life jacket.

• Post 5:

Alcohol + water = increased risk of drowning.
Stay sober. Stay safe.
#BoatSafe

• Post 6:

Emergencies happen fast.
Learn CPR—it could save a life before help arrives.
#CPRSavesLives



SWIM SUIT SAFETY

Bright-colored swimsuits can help children and swimmers be seen more quickly. Neon pink, orange, yellow, and green are often easier to spot underwater, while darker colors and blues can blend into the water.



LAKE SAFETY

1. **Always supervise children near the shoreline and docks** - Water depth can change suddenly.
2. **Wear life jackets during boating and water sports** - Open water conditions can shift quickly.
3. **Avoid swimming near boats or docks** - Stay in designated swimming areas.
4. **Be aware of cold water temperatures** - Even warm days can mean dangerously cold water below the surface.



BEACH SAFETY

1. **Swim near a lifeguard whenever possible** - Lifeguard-protected beaches are the safest places to swim.
2. **Watch for rip currents and warning flags** - Learn what beach warning systems mean before entering the water.
3. **Never swim alone** - Always use the buddy system.
4. **Protect against heat and sun exposure** - Stay hydrated, use sunscreen, and take breaks in the shade.



POOL SAFETY

1. **Always supervise children closely** - Stay within arm's reach and avoid distractions like phones or conversations.
2. **Install proper barriers** - Use four-sided fencing with self-latching gates around pools.
3. **Learn CPR** - Quick action can save a life before emergency responders arrive.
4. **Remove toys from the pool area after swimming** - Toys can attract children back to the water unsupervised.



BOAT SAFETY

1. **Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket** - Life jackets save lives—even strong swimmers should wear them.
2. **Never boat under the influence** - Alcohol increases the risk of drowning and boating crashes.
3. **Check weather and water conditions before heading out** - Storms and changing water conditions can become dangerous quickly.
4. **Carry emergency equipment** - Bring whistles, lights, communication devices, and first aid supplies.



Outreach Tools

 Press & Promotion Materials - Sample Op-Ed

Preventing Drowning Starts Before Anyone Enters the Water

As summer arrives in Pennsylvania, families across the Commonwealth head to pools, lakes, rivers, and parks to cool off and enjoy the outdoors. From the Susquehanna River to local swimming pools and neighborhood lakes, water recreation is part of what makes summer memorable. But every year, preventable drowning incidents and water-related injuries turn moments of fun into tragedy.

Drowning can happen quickly and silently. It does not always look like the dramatic splashing scenes portrayed in movies. In many cases, there is little noise, little warning, and only seconds to react.

Pennsylvania presents unique water safety challenges. Our state is home to thousands of miles of rivers and streams, along with countless lakes, ponds, and recreational waterways. Rivers may appear calm on the surface while hiding dangerous currents, drop-offs, cold water temperatures, and underwater debris. Low-head dams—sometimes called “drowning machines”—can create powerful recirculating currents that trap even experienced swimmers and boaters.

Water safety requires layers of protection.

For families with young children, active supervision is the most important step. Children should always be within arm’s reach near water, even if lifeguards are present. Designating a “Water Watcher”—an adult whose sole responsibility is watching the water without distractions like phones or conversations—can save lives.

Pool owners should ensure barriers are in place, including four-sided fencing with self-latching gates. Swim lessons are another important tool, but it is important to remember that swim skills do not replace supervision.

For boaters and those enjoying Pennsylvania’s lakes and rivers, life jackets remain one of the most effective ways to prevent drowning. Conditions on open water can change rapidly due to weather, currents, and water temperature. Wearing a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket significantly improves survival in an emergency.

Pennsylvania waterways also remain dangerously cold well into spring and early summer. Sudden cold-water immersion can trigger shock, impair breathing, and make swimming difficult within seconds.

Alcohol also plays a major role in many boating and water-related injuries and deaths. Water and alcohol are a dangerous combination that reduces judgment, balance, and reaction time.

Water safety is not just a summer conversation—it is a community responsibility. Parents, caregivers, schools, camps, healthcare professionals, recreation programs, and community organizations all play a role in prevention.

Simple actions save lives:

- Supervise children closely
- Wear life jackets
- Stay away from dams and fast-moving water
- Learn CPR
- Respect changing water conditions

Pennsylvania’s waterways should be places of recreation, connection, and enjoyment—not preventable tragedy. By taking water safety seriously and encouraging others to do the same, we can help ensure more families return home safely this summer.

For more water safety information, visit the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission or a local injury prevention organization.

— [Organization/Author Name]

[Title]

[Community or Organization]

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