

Death prompts pool scrutiny

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Two lifeguards on duty when a 15-year-old boy drowned at Livonia's Clements Circle Pool one year ago were not certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, despite state regulations requiring it.

Now, city officials say they are tracking such requirements more closely.

The lifeguards' lack of valid CPR cards was discovered by Ken Ascher, who is on the board of directors of the Washtenaw County chapter of the American Red Cross. Ascher obtained pool and lifeguard records through a series of Freedom of Information Act requests he filed after the Aug. 4, 1996, death of Donald Jones of Humble, Texas.

"In our county, I wouldn't want lifeguards to be subject to the same problem," Ascher said Monday. "I want them to be prepared."

Mayor Jack Kirksey acknowledged a bureaucratic lapse, but said he is convinced it had no bearing on Donald's death.

The teen died at Garden City Hospital after lifeguards pulled him from the pool and tried to resuscitate him. Emergency medical technicians took over the resuscitation effort and took Donald to the hospital. The Wayne County medical examiner's office ruled the death an

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accidental drowning.

"The people that worked on Donald did exactly what they were supposed to do," Kirksey said last week. "Nobody is suggesting they were lax in what they did."

Kirksey and Ron Reinke, superintendent of the parks and recreation department, said steps have been taken to verify lifeguards have the training they need.

Records sent to Ascher show that of the four lifeguards at Clements Circle that day, two had no current CPR certificates, including one woman who helped perform two-person CPR. She had valid Red Cross certificates in community first aid and safety, lifeguard training and water safety, but no evidence of a recent CPR course.

Kevin Killen, spokesman for the Southeastern Michigan chapter of the Red Cross, said community first aid and lifeguard training courses include CPR, but lifeguards must renew CPR certification yearly. The lifeguard took those courses two

and three years, respectively, before the drowning, records show.

Reinke said the woman had a CPR card that had expired within 45 days of the drowning, but that his office did not have a copy.

A male lifeguard who helped pull Donald from the water but did not perform CPR had a CPR card that had expired nearly three months earlier, records show.

No mistakes

Like Kirksey, Reinke said the lapse in certification did not mean the lifeguards made mistakes.

"I think they did everything letter-perfect," Reinke said, adding that Donald was breathing when he was taken from the pool, and CPR is not done when a subject is breathing.

"As soon as he stopped breathing, they did (CPR)," Reinke said.

Statements to police from witnesses and the lifeguards themselves say Donald was breathing

on his own for a short time.

Three of the four lifeguards have returned to the city for the 1997 swimming season, Reinke said. He added the drowning, the first in a Livonia public pool, was difficult for them. "It's difficult for all of us," he added.

No lawsuit has been filed over the incident.

Ascher said he is concerned that young lifeguards are exploited. A lack of training, he added, could affect their ability to respond in an emergency. "A lot of times they don't realize the responsibilities they're taking on," he said.

Ascher, the chairman of Communications Electronics Inc. of Ann Arbor, which distributes communication equipment used in emergencies, urged swimmers to look for posted certificates showing lifeguards have current CPR, lifesaving and first-aid training. Such documents must be posted at public pools.

At Clements Circle, the certificates are available in a binder in the manager's office.

Communications Electronics' weather hotline, (313) 994-9000, now includes a Touch-Tone survey to measure public awareness

that training certificates must be posted. Ascher said the survey was prompted by Donald's drowning and his investigation of it.

Killen said the Red Cross has been hired to provide in-service training — refresher courses in lifeguarding and CPR skills — to Livonia lifeguards.

Donald Jones was in the Detroit area visiting relatives at the time of the accident. Neither his mother, Joy Grandahl of Dearborn Heights, nor his grandfather, Donald Grandahl of Livonia, wanted to comment for this story.

John Caterino, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's environmental health section, which oversees public swimming pools, suggested the city was in compliance with state rules because two lifeguards had current training. The rules require one lifeguard for every 75 people within a pool's enclosure. There were 50 or 60 people in the pool area at the time, a lifeguard told police.

But Caterino added that he is an engineer and lifeguarding is not his area of expertise.