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Landmark International Study Launched to Understand the Prevalence and Impact of Critical Incidents Among Aquatic Personnel

Cumberland, RI – June 7, 2025 – In a pioneering global initiative, the International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA) and the Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services Research (AMES Research Center) at Kennesaw State University today announced the upcoming launch of the “Critical Incident Prevalence & Impact Study in Aquatics.” This crucial international research aims to rigorously evaluate the frequency and profound effects of critical incidents on aquatic personnel across multiple countries, addressing a significant gap in occupational health research for these often “forgotten first responders.”

Aquatic professionals, including lifeguards, swim instructors, and pool/beach managers, routinely face high-stress, potentially traumatic events such as active rescues, serious injuries and both fatal and non-fatal drownings. “Despite their vital role in public safety,” says **Tyler Anderson, ILCIRA President**, “there is a severe lack of comprehensive data on how common these critical incidents are and their subsequent impact on the physical health, mental well-being, and career longevity of these dedicated individuals. This study represents a foundational step towards developing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies.”

The study will delve into key research questions:

- **Prevalence:** How many aquatic personnel have experienced critical incidents, and what are the most common types of incidents encountered (e.g., active water rescues, major first aid events, drowning incidents)?
- **Impact:** How do critical incidents influence an employee's physical health, mental health (including symptoms of PTSD), and overall work well-being (e.g., job satisfaction, intention to quit)?
- **Resources:** What resources currently exist within aquatic work environments to prevent or manage critical incident stress, and what additional resources do employees desire?

“For years, the mental health of lifeguards as professional responders has been overlooked,” says **Wess Long, President of StarGuard Elite**, a leading provider of aquatic risk prevention programs worldwide “This study and the leaders guiding this research are poised to make a significant positive impact on the lifesaving industry. I strongly encourage all aquatic professionals to support these initiatives and work together to enhance our collective resources.”

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“Lifeguards are the first level of response to critical events in aquatic environments,” says **Julienne Hefter, Executive Director of the Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP)**. “The AOAP is working to help lifeguards be recognized more broadly as first responders. This research study will be a vital step towards acknowledging their unique experiences as first responders and developing the robust support systems they urgently need. Understanding factors like the link between critical incidents and staff turnover will be instrumental in fostering a more sustainable and healthier aquatic workforce.”

“Over the past forty years, as aquatic recreation facilities have grown dramatically in number and diversity of attractions, the responsibility and risk exposure for professional lifeguards has expanded,” said **Richard A. “RAC” Carroll, COO of Ellis and Associates**, a global provider of lifeguard instructor training and aquatic risk management services. “Focusing on how the stress of this tremendous responsibility impacts our aquatic first responders is incredibly important. By promoting this joint study, we have the opportunity to learn how to better support lifeguards in all aquatic environments, around the world.”

“This research will provide critical, empirically driven insight into the occupational hazards faced by aquatic professionals,” adds **Dr. Kristin Horan, Associate Professor of Psychology, AMES Research Center at Kennesaw State University**, who prepared the study overview. “By rigorously examining the impact of critical incidents on mental health, physical health, and job satisfaction, we can lay the groundwork for evidence-based strategies to mitigate stress and promote resilience.

The anonymous online survey will officially launch on **July 25, 2025**, coinciding with **World Drowning Prevention Day**. It will be accessible to any adult aquatic professional who speaks Arabic, English, Spanish, French or Portuguese. The study aims to gather insights from thousands of participants globally to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Adam Weir, CEO of Surf Life Saving Australia, highlights the importance of this study for lifesaving organizations, “Launching this study on World Drowning Prevention Day underscores a powerful truth: the mental health of responding personnel is central to drowning prevention. This research will help us better understand and respond to the impact of critical incidents across the water safety industry.”

Aquatic professionals are strongly encouraged to contribute to this landmark research by subscribing for updates at **ILCIRA.org**. Subscribers will be notified directly when the survey opens. Aquatic facilities, associations, and organizations are also urged to disseminate this information widely among their staff and members to maximize participation in this critical study.

Following data collection, a summary of the results will be shared with ILCIRA, partnering facilities and associations, and other stakeholders. The findings will also be presented to the scientific community through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications. Ultimately, the results will be used to inform future research and the development of effective prevention and treatment methods for critical incident stress in aquatic facilities worldwide. This research collaboration reflects a shared commitment across the aquatics industry to understanding what aquatic first responders face and ways we can work together to enhance their

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well-being.

About the International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA):

The International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the health, safety, and professional well-being of aquatic personnel worldwide. Through collaboration, advocacy, and research, ILCIRA strives to elevate standards, share best practices, and ensure comprehensive support for those on the front lines of water safety.

About the Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services Research (AMES Research Center) at Kennesaw State University:

The Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services Research (AMES Research Center) at Kennesaw State University is a leading interdisciplinary research center committed to improving the lives of military personnel, veterans, and emergency services professionals. The center conducts rigorous research on critical topics such as trauma, occupational stress, resilience, and the efficacy of prevention and intervention models, contributing to evidence-based practices in these vital fields.

Collaborating Agencies:



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