

BYSTANDER RESCUES



Beaches and other aquatic locations can, at times, be hazardous environments. At unpatrolled locations or in the absence of surf lifesaving services, it is often bystanders (i.e. members of the public, friends, or family) who are the only form of assistance to those in trouble. Tragically, it is not uncommon for the bystander rescuer themselves to get into trouble or drown while trying to rescue someone in distress.

Bystanders perform many rescues, providing a significant and valuable service to the community. The initial actions of a bystander are often what saves lives, however many are not trained or experienced in water-based rescue or the provision of first aid and CPR. This lack of knowledge and experience places both themselves and the rescuee at risk when attempting a rescue.

Between 2004 and 2022*, there have been 80 deaths of bystanders attempting to rescue someone on the coast, an average of five deaths each year. Most rescuers were male (83%), 40-54 years old (41%), and were rescuing a family member or loved one, usually a child under the age of 18. Rip currents were a significant factor in three-quarters of fatal bystander incidents (73%). Alarmingly 97% did not use a flotation device when they attempted the rescue. Providing a flotation device (i.e., something that floats – e.g., a surfboard, bodyboard, angel ring, rescue tube, esky lid) to a drowning patient is a priority intervention that interrupts the drowning process and is crucial for mitigating effects on rescuer safety.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified training bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation as an intervention priority to prevent drowning.

If you find yourself in a situation where you may be faced with having to perform a rescue, take a moment to STOP, LOOK and PLAN:



STOP

- Call for help (000) and to those nearby who might be able to assist
- Check for hazards and dangers to yourself and others



LOOK

- Seek assistance from others, such as surf lifesavers, lifeguards or surfers
- For a flotation device to support you and the person in trouble, e.g., this could be a surfboard, bodyboard, pool noodle, inflatable or rescue ring
- For some way to reach them without entering the water and putting yourself at risk, e.g., a pole, stick, rope



PLAN

- Swim at a patrolled beach
- Know what to do in an emergency
- Avoid a contact rescue – find a flotation device to take with you
- Learn CPR and/or first aid

** Data correct as of June 2023.*