

# know risk

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## Baptism Safety

Baptism is seen by many Christians as an outward expression of an inner decision or, in the case of a child, a commitment by the parent to raise the child to respect these same values.

Whilst most denominations practice baptism the method does vary between denominations.

The two most common forms of baptism are immersion and sprinkling (affusion). Immersion will normally take place in a font, pool or natural body of water whilst sprinkling will normally occur within the church.

The use of water in the ceremony needs to be effectively managed to reduce the risk of injury or damage. Baptismal fonts pose a unique risk to the church.

## Immersion Font

A body of water regardless of the size can be an attraction for small children. It only takes a few moments for a parent to lose sight of a child and soon after find them near or in the water.

As part of your obligations to provide a safe environment a policy needs to be developed by your church to ensure the font is cordoned off at the completion of the service until such time as it can be emptied. Stationing a member of the church in the vicinity of the font whilst there are people present in the chapel will further reduce the risk of an accident.

**Electricity and water do not mix.** There have been a number of occasions when persons in a baptismal font have been electrocuted as a result of touching a microphone or other electrical faults sending an electrical charge through the water.

We encourage all introductions and testimonies to be completed prior to the participants entering the font. If this is not possible you should ensure that there is no mains-wired

electrical equipment of any sort within arm's reach of the font and that a permanent warning is displayed on your PA equipment about this.

The policy should include:

- No wired microphone (i.e. connected by a lead to an amplifier) to be used in, or within two metres of a pool (not even someone outside the pool holding a long boom towards the pool – it could fall in).
- No other electric audio-visual equipment: camcorders, tape recorders, guitar, etc., connected to mains power even through a low voltage transformer, to be used within two metres of a pool.
- No light fitting or electric socket to be located within two metres of a pool.
- Permanent warning notice of this policy to be displayed near the PA equipment.
- If there are any permanent electric or microphone sockets within two metres of the pool (particularly power sockets set into the floor) they could easily be splashed and make the entire wet area live. Consult a qualified electrician about either totally isolating these circuits or covering them with waterproof sealing boxes.
- All electronic (and other) equipment should in any case be earthed.

**Water can pose a slip hazard.** Floor surfaces require sufficient grip to prevent slips from occurring especially in areas that may become wet when people leave the Immersion Font.

The flooring in the vicinity of the font needs to be checked and dried immediately after the Baptism has been completed. This is also relevant for churches utilising an Affusion Font.

Australia

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## Affusion Font

Whilst the risk of electrocution is reduced where an Affusion Font is in use the risk still remains. Electrical items in the vicinity of the font should be kept to a minimum and footwear should always be worn.

The majority of Affusion Fonts are solidly built of marble, granite or metal and hold very little water. It is still important to ensure the font is supervised before and after the service to ensure curious children do not climb onto the font pulling it over.

## Other Locations

It is not uncommon for baptisms to also take place in creeks, rivers, lakes and swimming pools.

The site of the baptism needs to be checked before the service takes place. Among the points to consider are:

- Parking for attendees;
- Paths/driveways to the location;
- Seating for and safety of attendees;
- Water suitability; and
- Use of PA equipment.

When assessing the suitability of the body of water you should be looking for submerged objects, floating hazards and checking the bottom is level and not too soft.

Lakes or still water can sometimes be colder than normal. It is often much colder below the surface than on the surface. Suddenly submerging into cold water can cause distress, shock and lack of mobility. Lakes should only be used during the warmer months.

The current in a river or creek needs to be assessed before entering. The currents can change the conditions in a river quickly. Remember that what is safe in the morning can be dangerous by the afternoon.

Finally, be SunSmart around the water.

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Sunburn is particularly prevalent when near water. The beach and community or backyard pools are major hot spots for sunburn.

Particular care should be taken from 10am to 2pm (11am to 3pm daylight saving time) when UV radiation levels are highest.

This material is for information purposes only. It is not intended to give specific legal or risk management advice nor are any suggestions, checklists or action plans intended to include or address all possible risk management exposures or solutions.