



## SWIMMER & PILOT SAFETY EXAM

June, 2011

- (1) You are successfully staying together as a pod when:
  - A. You can see the zodiac/kayak
  - B. You can't see anyone, or any water support
  - C. You can see all of the swimmers in your pod
  - D. You can see one of some of the other swimmers
  
- (2) If you are piloting a swim and have lost a swimmer or swimmers, how long should you wait before calling the Coast Guard?
  
- (3) What does the Coast Guard do when there is a man overboard or missing swimmer?
  
- (4) If a pilot calls the Coast Guard an hour after having last seen his/her swimmer, what good does it do?
  
- (5) If you are swimming under the Golden Gate Bridge, what can happen if you try to swim over to touch one of the towers?
  
- (6) If you are picked up or repositioned in a swim, was the swim a success?
  
- (7) You are on a club swim from Yacht Harbor to Aquatic Park in a good flood current. Suddenly, the opening is coming up quickly and, in fact, you are passing it by. You struggle for quite some time, against the current, trying to make it back to the club. What do you do once you've finally made it in safely?
  - A. Email the commissioner and complain about a lack of zodiac support and the fact that no one picked you up as soon as you began to struggle.
  - B. Recognize that your course was off and that you should have begun to cut in earlier.
  - C. Take a moment to think about whether you are indeed strong enough to be swimming in out-of-cove swims.
  
- (8) Who is responsible for your safety in the Bay?
  
- (9) Are you a strong swimmer, a moderate swimmer, or a weak swimmer?

- (10) Why does it matter how I am "classified" in terms of strength/speed?
- (11) If you REALLY can't get into a pool to swim a mile, but would like to find out how to classify yourself, what should you do?
- (12) If you are a weak swimmer, but would like to do some challenging swims, what kinds of things might you do to prepare yourself?
- (13) True or False: Swimming in the cove is boring.
- (14) You swim out to the opening for a view of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. What is very important to remember when you get beyond the cigarette buoy?
- (15) If you saw a tide book that showed at the Gate the following: 0441 Slack / 0751 4.0 Ebb / Slack 1146 am, at approximately what time does the Ebb reach a velocity of 4 knots at Alcatraz?
- (16) If you want to see the direction of the current inside the Cove, what should you do?
- (17) You are a new swimmer and would like to better understand what all this Bay swimming is about – not to mention how to approach South End etiquette. What should you do?
- (18) When a new ebb or flood current starts, where does it start?
- (19) Why does the above matter when you are swimming from Alcatraz to Aquatic Park?
- (20) If you find yourself either to the east or to the west, unable to make it to the opening, what should you do?
- (21) What is the closest we are supposed to come to Alcatraz? Why?
- (22) If you are a pilot and a swimmer is not staying with his/her group, what should you do?
- (23) What Channels should a South End zodiac pilot monitor?
- (24) On what Channel is the Coast Guard?
- (24) If you need to talk to the Harbor Pilot on a large commercial vessel, what frequency would you use?

(25) What are some "nicknames" used at the South End Rowing Club that Vessel Traffic and the Coast Guard do not know (and how should you refer to them to be understood)?

(26) If you are piloting frequently, what numbers would you program into your cell phone (which should be with you in a plastic bag)?

(26) If you want to assess whether a swimmer is hypothermic, what should you do?

(27) What is a good thing to ask yourself (and the others with whom you are swimming) before you head out on an adventure?



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### ANSWERS

(1) You are successfully staying together as a pod when:

- A. You can see the zodiac/kayak
- B. You can't see anyone, or any water support
- C. You can see all of the swimmers in your pod
- D. You can see one of some of the other swimmers

ANSWER: C

(2) If you are piloting a swim and have lost a swimmer or swimmers, how long should you wait before calling the Coast Guard?

ANSWER: 5 minutes!!!

(3) What does the Coast Guard do when there is a man overboard or missing swimmer?

ANSWER: The Coast Guard takes all of the information on the swimmer, most importantly, the last known location. They then input the information into the SAR-OPS (Search & Rescue) system. The inputting process takes a good 15-20 minutes. After that, they have a report showing the most probable locations of the person/swimmer (based on particle drift). The search & rescue operation starts in the most probable spot and expands their search outwards from there.

(4) If a pilot calls the Coast Guard an hour after having last seen his/her swimmer, what good does it do?

ANSWER: Almost none!! Sure, they will start a search & rescue. The likelihood of finding the swimmer though, is very low.

(5) If you are swimming under the Golden Gate Bridge, what can happen if you try to swim over to touch one of the towers?

ANSWER: You can get pulled under by the water and die!

(6) If you are picked up or repositioned in a swim, was the swim a success?

ANSWER: NO!!! Everyone has an occasional off day and even strong swimmers may occasionally pull themselves. In general though, if you are having to pull yourself from swims and/or be repositioned, this is a BIG clue that you are attempting swims that are beyond your ability and are likely taking pilot resources away from their job of monitoring the group.

(7) You are on a club swim from Yacht Harbor to Aquatic Park in a good flood current. Suddenly, the opening is coming up quickly and, in fact, you are passing it by. You struggle for quite some time, against the current, trying to make it back to the club. What do you do once you've finally made it in safely?

- A. Email the commissioner and complain about a lack of zodiac support and the fact that no one picked you up as soon as you began to struggle.
- B. Recognize that your course was off and that you should have begun to cut in earlier.
- C. Take a moment to think about whether you are indeed strong enough to be swimming in out-of-cove swims.

ANSWER: B & C

(8) Who is responsible for your safety in the Bay?

ANSWER: You are!!! In particular, you are responsible for determining whether you are able to participate in a particular swim.

(9) Are you a strong swimmer, a moderate swimmer, or a weak swimmer?

ANSWER:

- If you can swim a mile in a pool in 20 minutes or less, you are a very strong swimmer
- If you can swim a mile in a pool in 20 to 25 minutes, you are a fairly strong swimmer
- If you can swim a mile in a pool in 25 to 30 minutes, you are a moderate swimmer
- If it takes you longer than 30 minutes to swim a mile in a pool, you are a weak swimmer

(10) Why does it matter how I am "classified" in terms of strength/speed?

Swimmers need to be realistic in assessing their skills and their ability to complete various swims.

If you are a very strong swimmer, you can probably handle quite a lot of situations in the water. Of course, there are always the risks of hypothermia, having some kind of medical emergency out there, or some kind of emergency created by a vessel on the water. We have a handful of very strong swimmers at the South End, but not many. If have any question about whether you are a very strong swimmer, you are probably not.

If you are a fairly strong swimmer, you can handle quite a bit out there, but need to be careful.

If you are a moderate swimmer, you need to be pretty darn careful out there. You are often pretty good in a "with the current" swim, but can get pushed pretty easily in a cross-current swim.

If you are a weak swimmer, you need to be VERY CAREFUL!! There are LOTS of weak swimmers at the club. We love them all, of course.

(11) If you REALLY can't get into a pool to swim a mile, but would like to find out how to classify yourself, what should you do?

ANSWER: Email Michelle Deasy (michellecdeasy@gmail.com). She can ask you some questions with regard to which club members you usually swim with and can give you an honest assessment of your swim abilities.

(12) If you are a weak swimmer, but would like to do some challenging swims, what kinds of things might you do to prepare yourself?

ANSWER:

- Participate in some of the clinics that have been offered by the swim commissioner this year
- Get yourself into a Masters swim program
- Take some swim lessons or buy a book on swim form – and then practice your skills in a pool
- Do some interval work along the buoy line – sprint to one buoy, easy to the next, sprint to the next buoy, easy to the next...
- Buy a pair of paddles and work on learning how to PULL water when you swim!! (Could even be done in the cove.)
- Do some against-the-current swimming along the breakwater

(13) True or False: Swimming in the cove is boring.

ANSWER: FALSE!!! The cove is beautiful and there is LOTS of fun to be had. If you don't feel like just "swimming a cove," you can (a) do some interval work ala buoy sprints, (b) do some interval work ala boat sprints, (c) do the "Bo Derek" workout, combining your swimming with some jogging along the sand, (d) jump off the end of muni pier, (e) come up with something else creative to do!

(14) You swim out to the opening for a view of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. What is very important to remember when you get beyond the cigarette buoy?

ANSWER: A current is likely running out there and you could suddenly find yourself being pushed and unable to get back in through the opening. If there is a flood current running, you should venture out on the WEST side of the opening. If there is an ebb current running, you should venture out on the EAST side of the opening.

(15) If you saw a tide book that showed at the Gate the following: 0441 Slack / 0751 4.0 Ebb / Slack 1146 am, at approximately what time does the Ebb reach a velocity of 4 knots at Alcatraz?

ANSWER: Approximately 6:51am. Slack Tide, Max Ebb and Max Flood usually hit one hour before they hit the Golden Gate.

Some will argue that the adjustment should be less than an hour. Upon cross-referencing the tide book with an online site for currents at Alcatraz, the author believes an hour is indeed the correct adjustment.

(16) If you want to see the direction of the current inside the Cove, what should you do?

ANSWER: Head up to the Day Room and take a look out the window. Which way are the boats being pushed? If they are being pushed toward the Golden Gate bridge, there is likely an ebb occurring. If they

are being pushed toward the Bay Bridge, there is likely a flood occurring. (Of course, wind can be a little bit of a factor too!)

(17) You are a new swimmer and would like to better understand what all this Bay swimming is about – not to mention how to approach South End etiquette. What should you do?

ANSWER: Pick up a copy of the New Swimmer Guide, available in the Day Room.

(18) When a new ebb or flood current starts, where does it start?

ANSWER: A new current starts close to the shore line

(19) Why does the above matter when you are swimming from Alcatraz to Aquatic Park?

ANSWER: While it may feel like there is no current out in the middle of the Bay, it may not be a good idea to head straight for the opening. If a new current is about to start (which is usually the case in a slack tide, when Alcatraz swims are typically scheduled), it will start near the shore. SO, you may get close to the opening and SUDDENLY get pushed east (in a flood) or west (in an ebb). You need to keep this in mind and plan for it!

(20) If you find yourself either to the east or to the west, unable to make it to the opening, what should you do?

ANSWER: Head in and swim as close to the pier or the breakwater as is possible. The current will be weakest here. Some will swim UNDER Muni Pier, where the current is REALLY weak. Beware though, Muni Pier is not in good condition and the author often wonders if there is a risk that it someday crumbles on top of a swimmer.

(21) What is the closest we are supposed to come to Alcatraz? Why?

ANSWER: 200 yards. A certain type of bird breeds on Alcatraz. If they are frightened off, they do not return to their nests.

(22) If you are a pilot and a swimmer is not staying with his/her group, what should you do?

ANSWER: Pull the swimmer and reposition them with the rest of the group.

(23) What Channels should a South End zodiac pilot monitor?

ANSWER: Channels 14 (Vessel Traffic) and 69 (South Enders)

(24) On what Channel is the Coast Guard?

ANSWER: Channel 16

(25) If you need to talk to the Harbor Pilot on a large commercial vessel, what frequency would you use?

ANSWER: Channel 13 inside the gate and Channel 12 outside the gate

(26) What are some "nicknames" used at the South End Rowing Club that Vessel Traffic and the Coast Guard do not know (and how should you refer to them to be understood)?

ANSWERS:

- Coghlan Beach – Golden Gate Yacht Club
- Gas House Cove – Fort Mason
- The Creekers – East end of the Aquatic Park breakwater

(27) If you are piloting frequently, what numbers would you program into your cell phone (which should be with you in a plastic bag)?

ANSWER: Vessel Traffic – 415.556.2760. Coast Guard – 415.399.3547.

(28) If you want to assess whether a swimmer is hypothermic, what should you do?

ANSWER: Ask that swimmer some basic questions and see if they can answer them – What day of the week is it? Where are you? Things like that.

(29) What is a good thing to ask yourself (and the others with whom you are swimming) before you head out on an adventure?

ANSWER: "What could go wrong with this plan?!"