

Safety and Training Manual for Swimmers and Boaters

A guide to Safely Crossing the Lake

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Introduction

Women Swimmin' for Hospicare is a community swim (not a race!) that raises money to support the mission of Hospicare & Palliative Care Services. The safety of all participants, volunteers, staff and guests is of utmost importance! This is a large event with many participants of varying ages and abilities, so it is important for everyone to be aware of the roles each person plays, and other information or procedures set up to ensure the safety of everyone present. Please read the entirety of this Guide to understand how we all work together to make sure everyone has a fun and very safe swim.

For updates and news, be sure to check our website at womenswimmin.org or our Facebook page at facebook.com/WomenSwimmin regularly.

The remainder of this guide outlines safety procedures and expectations related to the swim across the lake for Lake Swimmers.

Lake Swimmers

Swimmer Requirements

All Lake Swimmers participating in Women Swimmin' for Hospicare must identify as female, be age 18 or older by the day of the event and assert that they are physically fit and ready to swim 1.2 miles in open water, under their own power.

As a Lake Swimmer for Women Swimmin' for Hospicare, you agree to:

- Pay a non-refundable \$25 registration fee when you register.
- Sign our liability waiver and publicity release.
- Raise (or donate) an additional \$300 (total \$325) by **the Friday before the swim**. In July we will check with swimmers who have not reached their fundraising minimum to confirm that they still plan to participate and have the tools and information they need to be successful in reaching their fundraising goals.
- Swim within the swim lane for the entire course as defined by the Line Safety Paddlers and Kayak Safety Team (KST).
- Follow the rules outlined by Hospicare and the Women Swimmin' Committee, including, but not limited to, not entering the water unless specifically directed to do so.
- Wear a Women Swimmin' swim cap for the entire course.
- Cross on your own power.
- Check out with the check-out volunteers on the dock when you finish your swim.
- Stay home if you feel sick or have a cough, a fever, or are having difficulty breathing.
- Email womenswimmin@hospicare.org if at any point you realize you will not be able to participate in the Lake swim.

Physical Expectations

You should not participate in the swim if on the day of the event you are not in good health or have become aware of any physical or medical condition that would make participation in the event an unacceptable risk. You should be able to walk down a 32-foot ramp using handrails and enter the water and swim 1.2 miles across the lake. By the day of the swim, you should have enough experience, and should have undertaken sufficient training, to be highly confident of your ability to complete the 1.2-mile course in conditions that might be considered "choppy."

However, you always have the option to leave the swim course if you don't feel safe.

Swimwear and Equipment

Swimwear

Lake swimmers are required to wear a swimsuit or other appropriate swim gear. Many swimmers choose to wear wetsuits, swim shirts (rash guards), or swim skins. The following descriptions should help you evaluate the benefits of each type of swimwear and determine what might work best for you on the day of the swim. The lake temperature may influence your choice. You can periodically check the water temperature at LakeMonster.com.

- **Wetsuits:** Lake water can be cold. Wetsuits trap a thin layer of water next to your skin, which quickly heats to your body temperature and acts as insulation. Wet suits also can protect against the sun (depending on sleeve length) and make you more streamlined and buoyant in the water. Wetsuits can be full-body coverage, short-sleeved or sleeveless, lava pants, or “long-janes” in shorts or full length.
NOTE: Water temperatures above 84 degrees can make it easy to overheat in a wetsuit. If water temperatures are on the rise and you still want to wear a wetsuit, consider a sleeveless one.
- **Swim Shirts (Rash Guards):** Swim shirts come in fun patterns and provide good sun protection (many are UPF 50+) while you are in the water, but their basic purpose is not to keep you warm. Loose-fitting shirts will create quite a bit of drag, which may slow your swim. If you choose this option, the shirt should fit snugly.
- **Swim Skins:** Swim skins are smaller, thinner and non-buoyant alternatives to wetsuits and can be worn when the water is too warm for a wetsuit. A swim skin is designed to be very snug. It enhances speed through the water by compressing the body and creating minimal friction with the passing water.

Equipment to Use

In addition to your swimsuit, the only mandatory equipment you must wear for Women Swimmin' is the Women Swimmin' latex swim cap you'll receive in your swimmer packet. Every swimmer in a pod wears the same color swim cap to indicate they're a group, and to differentiate themselves from other pods entering the water around the same time. The bright colors are important for visibility, and you must wear it for the entire swim.

These items are all acceptable to use during Women Swimmin' if you've been practicing with them:

- Goggles
- Fins or flippers
- Swim buoys. Swim buoys are highly encouraged! They make you more visible to everyone supporting your swim!

Equipment NOT to Use

For safety reasons, we don't allow certain types of equipment. You should not expect to use the following:

- Snorkel. The lake can be choppy and water may wash into a snorkel pipe, which can be dangerous if you don't know how to clear it. A snorkel can also limit your awareness of your surroundings, including the escort paddlers who are guiding you across the lake.

- Personal flotation devices or kickboards. Be honest about your comfort level in the lake: if you have not swum a mile before, this is not the time to do it for the first time.
- Equipment you've never used before. The day of Women Swimmin' is not the day to try out new equipment or swimwear!

Important Notes About Swim Equipment

We recognize some women have physical needs that necessitate non-standard equipment. If you require any accommodation or additional equipment (other than a wet suit, goggles, flippers, and/or a latex swim cap) to complete the swim, please inform the Women Swimmin' organizers as soon as possible. You can email this information to womenswimmin@hospicare.org.

Try it out. Whatever swimwear you choose to wear or equipment you choose to use, be sure to borrow, rent or purchase it several weeks before the swim. Arrange some time to try it out in the lake so you can see how it feels and get used to swimming in it. The day of the swim is not the time to try out new equipment!

Training Tips and Information

Be sure you are comfortable with the distance and swim in the lake at least once during the summer.

Training for Women Swimmin' is an essential responsibility to yourself and other participants! Remember, your comfort and safety help ensure the comfort and safety of 300+ other swimmers and 150 boaters. Suggestions for training, a list of places to swim in Ithaca and information about swim clinics can be found on the [Lake Swimmer Information page on the Women Swimmin' website](#).

Paddlers and Boaters

With an anticipated 300+ swimmers crossing the lake, paddlers and boaters for Women Swimmin' play a vital supporting role! You're an integral part of the event's overall safety plan.

General Requirements for all Paddlers and Boaters

All volunteer paddlers or boaters must be at least 18 years of age by the day of the swim. Similarly, anyone who is a second paddler in a canoe, or any passengers on power boats or wave runners must be 18 years of age. This is an insurance requirement.

As a support paddler or boater for Women Swimmin' for Hospicare, you agree to:

- Register as a paddler or power boater at the Women Swimmin' website (www.womenswimmin.org). If you're not able to sign yourself up online, contact Hospicare staff to help you, 607-272-0212.
- Sign our liability waiver and publicity release.
- Attend the appropriate Mandatory Meeting (Thu Aug 10, 7-8 pm at the IYC for power boaters and Fri Aug 11, 6:30-8 pm at Boynton Middle School for paddlers).

- Arrive at the Ithaca Yacht Club (IYC) on swim day with enough time to unload your boat, park your car, launch your boat and paddle to your assigned spot:
 - Line Safety Paddlers (LSP) arrive by **6am**
 - Escort Paddlers arrive **75-90 minutes** before your pod's scheduled start time
- Stay home if you feel sick or have a cough, a fever, or are having difficulty breathing.
- Email womenswimmin@hospicare.org if you need to cancel.

Requirements for Power Boaters and Wave Runners

Power boats and wave runners play an important safety role for Women Swimmin'. The Women Swimmin' Safety Coordinator will review the roles and responsibilities of this team at the Thursday Aug 10 meeting at IYC. All powerboats and wave runners must be equipped with standard safety equipment, including PFDs for all on board, a throwable flotation device, and an efficient sound-producing device (whistle or horn).

Requirements for Paddlers

Paddlers use kayaks, canoes, or stand-up paddleboards (SUPs) to guide and support our swimmers as they cross the lake. All paddlers **MUST** be proficient with their watercraft, have experience in open water and be comfortable in choppy and/or windy conditions. You should be able to paddle across the lake in 15-20 minutes and comfortable staying in/on that craft between 2 ½ and 4 hours.

Paddlers must also follow these specific requirements, (in addition to the general requirements listed above):

- Wear a personal floatation device (PFD), securely fastened (fully buckled or zipped) for the entire time you are on the water.
- Wear the Women Swimmin' hat you'll receive at the paddler meeting the night before the entire time you're on the water.
- **ARRIVE EARLY!** This will allow you enough time to unload your vessel, park your car, launch, and paddle to the east shore of the lake.
 - Line Safety Paddlers (line course with Kayak Safety Team (KST)) should arrive at the Ithaca Yacht Club (IYC) on Swim Day at **6 a.m.**
 - Escort Paddlers (travel with swimmers) should arrive **75-90 minutes** (about 1 and a half hours) before their Swimmer Pod is scheduled to go in the water.
- Follow directions given by KST. Members of the KST are equipped with radios for communication with power boaters, rescue personnel and organizers on shore. Conditions on the water are changeable and the KST is there to direct you to where you will be most helpful. KST members wear bright orange hats.

Paddler Equipment

You agree to have the following **equipment**:

- A spare PFD or throwable flotation device, secured to the deck of your craft to throw to a swimmer in distress.
- The designated 2023 Women Swimmin' baseball hat. The hat identifies you as a registered participant and must be worn.
- A whistle attached to your PFD (for those without one, we'll provide the whistle at the Mandatory Boater Meeting).

- Sunglasses, sunscreen, and water.

Mandatory Boater Meetings

All support paddlers and power boaters must attend the appropriate mandatory meeting. These meetings are required by Hospicare's insurance carrier for you to participate in the event. Exact times and locations will be shared via email and on the Women Swimmin' website.

- **Mandatory Power Boaters and Wave Runners:** Thursday, August 10, 7-8 pm at the IYC
- **Mandatory Paddler Meeting:** Friday, August 11, 7 – 8 pm at Boynton Middle School

At the meetings you will:

- Receive instructions for the morning of the swim, including your responsibilities.
 - Escort Paddlers will receive their Swimmer Pod assignment.
 - Line Safety Paddlers will receive their KST “Buddy” assignment.
 - KST will receive radios and position assignments, as well as Line Safety Paddler ‘Buddy’ assignments.
- Receive your Women Swimmin' for Hospicare baseball hat. This hat is your ticket to breakfast.
- Pick up a whistle, if you need one.
- Ask any last-minute questions.
- Meet other boaters, volunteers, and Hospicare staff.
- Have the opportunity to purchase raffle tickets for a sweet watercraft and merchandise.
- Submit any additional funds raised.

Boater Training Tips and Clinics

As a paddler for Women Swimmin' you play a vital role! It's your job to work with other paddlers to keep all swimmin' women safe as they swim across the lake. While your enthusiasm is appreciated, being a paddler for Women Swimmin' is not for everyone. This event is NOT for individuals who are beginner kayakers, SUPers, or canoeists. You must have experience in open water, be comfortable in choppy and/or windy conditions, and be easily able to paddle 3-5 miles. You must be competent to maneuver your boat in close quarters (around swimmers) and comfortable in/on your craft for 3-4 hours. Inexperienced paddlers can compromise the safety of both swimmers and other boaters.

Training to be a paddler for Women Swimmin' is highly recommended. Your comfort and safety will help ensure the comfort and safety of everyone on the water. Suggestions for training, as well as information about paddler clinics can be found on the [Boater/Paddler Info page of the Women Swimmin' website](#).

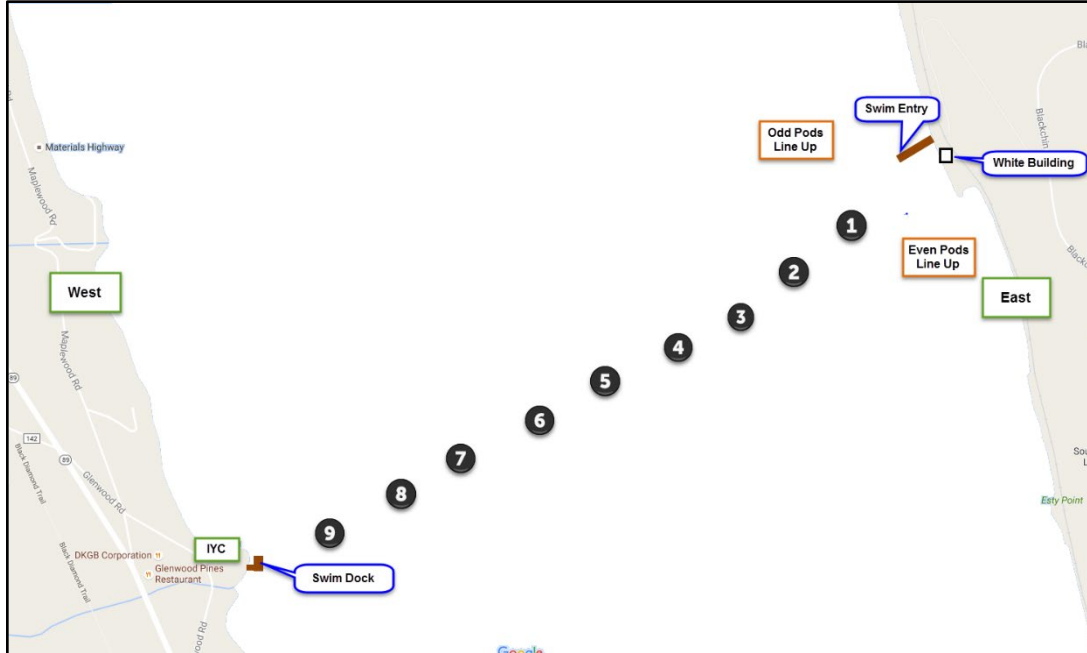
The Women Swimmin' safety team will hold **Optional Support & Escort Boater Clinics**. Bring your boat and PFD and be prepared for full immersion in the lake. While these are optional, they are strongly encouraged, especially for newer paddlers. You can attend one session or both!

- **Sunday, July 23** – 6-8 pm; at the IYC
- **Monday, August 7**– 6-8 pm; at the IYC

The Swim Across the Lake

Swim Course

The swim lane swings slightly to the south to accommodate the ever-present current coming from the south, before heading west. Follow the course and don't worry that you are going in the wrong direction. This will help you swim the shortest distance and most direct course to IYC.



Line Safety Paddlers (LSP) and KST are deployed in roving positions along the sides of the course. They're available to assist swimmers and other paddlers as needed. There is a single line of buoys along the middle of the course to help swimmers and Escort Paddlers stay on course for IYC. Swim from buoy to buoy, within the swim lane defined by the LSP and KST. **For the safety of everyone on the lake, swimmers and escort paddlers must stay within the defined swim lane for the entire course.**

It's very important to be aware of wind and current drift so escorts and swimmers aren't pushed off course. You may have to continuously adjust the course to stay within the swim lane and on course to the IYC.

Starting the Swim

Around 6:30 a.m., the first transport bus will begin to load groups of swimmers at Cass Park for transport to the east side of the lake. Swimmers arrive by bus at the east shore of the lake shortly before their assigned start time. Escort Paddlers must be at the east shore entry point by the arrival time of their assigned pod.

As swimmers exit the bus, the Wave Manager will hand the pods off to volunteers who will direct each pod to the entry ramp when it's their turn. After they get off the bus, swimmers each put their last-minute belongings in a small bag with their names, which is then put into a mesh bag with their pod's number on it. Eyeglasses should be in a case, marked with a swimmer's name. These go in a special bag for eyeglasses and are delivered directly to the south dock where swimmers exit the water, so swimmers can have their eyeglasses as soon as they finish their swim.

Swimmers will enter the water via a ramp with handrails on both sides, pushing off into approximately waist-deep water.

The Swimming Coordinator on shore will let each pod know when to enter the water. There is also an Escort Wrangler in a kayak near the entry point who will connect the swimmers to their assigned Escort Paddlers. The pod will not leave the entry area until the swimmers and their Escort Paddlers are clearly established.

As the swimmers move onto the swim course, this is a good time for Swimmers and Escort Paddlers to introduce themselves and establish communication preferences:

- Some Swimmers want to stay with an Escort Paddler for the entire course. A Swimmer should let her Escorts know this from the beginning.
- Determine the best place for the Escort to be positioned to communicate with their swimmers. Considering the following: which side the swimmer breathes on (if only one side, stay on their breathing side) and wind and current (position yourself so wind doesn't push you into them).
- Swimmers can let their Escorts know any other important details, such as whether they anticipate keeping a relaxed pace or will be speedy and direct.
- Some Swimmers will appreciate chatting with their Escort Paddlers throughout their swim; other Swimmers only want to talk when necessary to stay on course and safe. Escorts and Swimmers should establish these preferences at the beginning.
- The overall safety of the event depends on swimmers and paddlers maintaining communication with each other.

Crossing the Lake

Women Swimmin' is a community swim, not a race. Each swimmer should feel free to swim at her own pace. More experienced or faster swimmers will pass other swimmers. Pods of swimmers who started out together will naturally drift apart as they make their way to the IYC. We expect this and have people and procedures in place to keep everyone safe.

Each Swimmer's job is to stay the course *at her own pace*. The Escort Paddler's job is to stay close enough to maintain contact with Swimmers, while giving them space.

Staying on Course

The Escort's mission is to keep Swimmers on course. **It is important that each Swimmer and Escort Paddler stays within the defined swim lane.**

It can be hard for swimmers to hear so positioning your vessel as a guide may be the best way to keep them on course. Paddlers need to stay close enough to maintain contact with Swimmers while giving them space.

If a swimmer is veering off-course, the Escort should yell, wave their arms, or slap the surface of the water to get her attention and redirect her back into the swim lane. The Escort can also give the Swimmer updates (if she would like) as to how far she's come along the course.

Staying Together

The main safety motto of Women Swimmin' for Hospicare is "No one swims alone!" Swimmers are encouraged to stay with their pod as much as possible. While each pod of 8-10 swimmers starts out together, it's very reasonable that they won't all stay together for the whole course; swimmers should form smaller groups of 2-3 swimmers and an Escort Paddler so they're not alone in the lake.

Escort Paddlers should stay with the Swimmers who request Escorts for the entire course or pass these swimmers off to an Escort Paddler behind or ahead of them, as pace indicates. For all swimmers who want Escort support across the entire course to have that support, some swimmers may have to adjust their pace to stay with Escorts. This is a joint responsibility, shared by both the Escort Paddlers and swimmers.

Changing Pace and Passing Swimmers to Other Escorts

If a Swimmer finds that the pace of other swimmers in her pod is incompatible with her own, she'll let an Escort Paddler know that she needs to go ahead or fall back with another pod.

- The Escort asks the Swimmer to pause for a moment so they can let the other pod's Escort know.
- The Escort alerts an Escort ahead or behind their pod to get their attention.
- The first Escort indicates a swimmer will be moving ahead or falling behind to join that pod. The second Escort indicates his or her understanding of the request.
- When handing a swimmer off to another Escort, introduce the swimmer and Escort by name and make sure they clearly acknowledge each other, confirming the hand-off.

Resting

If a Swimmer needs a break, she can hold onto the front (never the back or sides) of an Escort's vessel and rest in place. Swimmers should hold the front of the vessel (as if eating a large sandwich) with fingers overlapping, thumbs on the bottom and fingers on top. This will keep the vessel balanced and the swimmer visible. The Escort Paddler can guide the Swimmer in how to do this. **No paddler will move forward while a swimmer is resting using their vessel.**

The other Swimmers in the group simply tread water for a brief period to wait until their pod-mate is ready to continue.

If a swimmer cannot proceed under her own power after resting, she must communicate that to an Escort or Support Paddler.

Helping Tired Swimmers

All of the swimmers are eager and excited about the swim and most of them will complete the 1.2-mile swim without incident. Sometimes, though, a swimmer can become fatigued or distressed. Escort paddlers should check-in with swimmers to ask how they're doing. The Paddler's job is to be observant for any signs of distress and to help support the swimmer through that.

Sometimes a Swimmer realizes something isn't right or that she's too fatigued or unwell to continue her swim. She can tell an Escort Paddler or raise her arm to signal she needs help. Other times, a Swimmer may not know or may not be able to articulate her distress, so the Escort Paddler (and other Swimmers in the group) needs to look for signs. Signs that a Swimmer is in distress might look like:

- Disoriented
- Loss of coordination
- Not responding, slurred speech
- Shivering
- Blue or purple lips or skin

Signal for help (by raising your arm) to leave the water or let your escort paddler know you need to leave the water. The escort paddler will let the KST know, who will coordinate a wave runner

to take you to shore. There are lifeguards and trained medical personnel in powerboats with appropriate life-saving devices.

In the event a swimmer is in distress, the Escort Paddler proceeds as follows:

- Speak to the swimmer and make eye contact. Ask if she's OK.
- Get her attention then tell her you're going to throw her something to hold onto.
- Toss your (mandatory) spare PFD or throwable to her. Practice tossing a PFD (like a frisbee) before the swim and take care with your aim.
- Ask the swimmer to stay still and tell her you will bring the front of your boat to her. Never let a swimmer grab onto the side of your boat. Paddle backwards if she attempts this.
- Keep the swimmer in front of you so you monitor her condition.
- Talk with the swimmer. Ask, specifically, if she's prepared to continue.
- If a swimmer wants to continue but, in your judgment, doesn't appear to be in condition to do so (fatigue, shivering, slurring words, not responding quickly and appropriately, etc...) call in a member of the KST (wearing bright orange hats), to assess the swimmer. They will help you determine the next steps.
- If she says she cannot continue the swim, alert a member of the Kayak Safety Team. They will radio for a wave runner to give the swimmer a ride back to shore.
- **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A PADDLER EXIT THEIR BOAT AND ENTER THE WATER TO ASSIST A SWIMMER.**
- Lifeguards will be on the powerboats and will be called in if needed.

All swimmers must complete their lake crossing by 11:00 a.m. If a swimmer seems unlikely to finish by that time, a judgment call on whether to end her swim and boat her back to shore (or the IYC) will be based on discussion between the swimmer, paddler, and the KST.

Finishing the Swim

Upon completing the swim course, all Swimmers must exit the water **only** by way of the IYC's South Dock. Look for the ladders to climb onto the dock. If a Swimmer is unable to climb the ladder for some reason (fatigued or cramped muscles, physical limitations) and exits the water along the shore, she – or her Escort - should make sure a volunteer on the dock knows and records her name.

Check-out volunteers holding green notebooks will be waiting to greet Swimmers and check their names off a list. Do not leave the dock without getting your name checked off the list when you exit the water. If needed, blankets will be available when you climb onto the dock.

Due to the limited amount of space available and the related safety concerns, **only** authorized staff may be present on the dock. Family and friends can meet you after you exit the South Dock. You should leave the dock as soon as you are checked off the list; please don't wait on the dock for other swimmers to finish.

Eyeglasses can be retrieved from the bin on the South Dock, and your change of clothes and other items will be on the tables by the Swimmer Changing Space.

When Escort Paddlers are finished escorting their pod, they will return to the East shore for their next pod assignment if they're a Super Paddler. All others are encouraged to join the LSP & KST lining the course. When paddlers have finished their assigned duties, they should exit at the launch station at the Ithaca Yacht Club. Paddlers must check-out at the tent by the launch when they have finished.

Swim Conditions

In the days leading up to and early the morning of the Lake Swim, Hospicare staff and the Women Swimmin' Safety Team will be monitoring weather forecasts and environmental quality, including harmful algal blooms (HABS), air quality, lake conditions, and any other concerns that could adversely affect swimmers, paddlers, and volunteers. If there is uncertainty about lake conditions due to weather or other environmental concerns, the Safety Team will assess the situation the morning of the swim and post updates on womenswimmin.org or facebook.com/WomenSwimmin. In the event the swim across the lake is canceled **due to weather**, the party is cancelled. If HABS are found on the morning inspection, the party may still happen at the Ithaca Yacht Club.

Weather

The Women Swimmin' Safety Team coordinates with experts from Cornell Meteorology and monitors conditions closely to ensure conditions are safe for swimmers and paddlers to cross the lake. Conditions that would require us to cancel or amend the swim include the threat of a thunderstorm, rough water, high winds, or lightning.

Safety Protocol for Harmful Algae Blooms (HABS)

In previous years, the presence of blue-green algae blooms, or harmful algae blooms (HABs), in Cayuga Lake were identified as a potential health hazard for swimmers and led to the temporary closing of local swimming beaches. The health and safety of all our swimmers, paddlers, boaters, and volunteers is always our highest priority. In response to the potential health risks posed by HABs at the time, Hospicare established a protocol for determining when, in the interest of safety, the presence of blue-green algae requires the cancellation of the swimming portion of our event.

In the weeks preceding this year's event, Hospicare staff will monitor information about lake conditions to learn of any reports of HABs and will act in accordance with the established protocol. Sources of information include local media, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the local state parks offices, the Ithaca Yacht Club, and the Tompkins County Department of Health (TCDOH).

If HABs are actively present at or near the course within 72 hours (3 days) of the event, the swimming portion of the event will be canceled and alternative arrangements for a celebration will be planned. If HABs have been reported but are not actively present at or near the course within 72 hours (3 days) of the event, monitoring will continue until the morning of the event.

Women Swimmin' organizers will keep all swimmers and boaters apprised of the HAB risks. We understand that some swimmers, paddlers, boaters or volunteers may not be comfortable coming in contact with the lake water and should base their participation in the event on their own assessment of risk and their own personal preferences.

Evacuation Procedure

In the extremely unlikely event that it becomes necessary to evacuate the swim course during the event, the Safety Coordinator and the KST will coordinate the evacuation. They will communicate directions to the power boaters and all other paddlers. The KST and the support/escort paddlers will advise swimmers of the evacuation. All event participants must follow the instructions given by the KST.

In general, this procedure will be followed:

- Swimmers who have not yet entered the water from the swim entry point will return to their buses and will be taken to the Ithaca Yacht Club (IYC).
- The evacuation of swimmers who are already in the water will be based on their location on the swim course.
- The KST will direct swimmers who are close to either shore to swim to the nearest shore. Swimmers returning to the east shore will be transported back to the IYC by bus. Their names will be recorded and given to the Check-Out Volunteer on the North Dock of the IYC.
- Swimmers not close to either shore will be picked up by boat. The KST will direct paddlers and swimmers to the appropriate powerboat, or to where they can wait for a powerboat.
- Staff on the boats will record the names of the swimmers removed from the water and give those lists to the Check-Out Volunteers on the North Dock of the IYC.
- Check-Out Volunteers at the South Dock of the IYC will record names of swimmers who exit the water there.
- All swimmers, no matter how or where they leave the water, must make sure that their name is recorded.
- When paddlers are comfortable that their swimmers have been accounted for, they should exit the water to the east or west.
- KST members will be the last paddlers to leave the lake.