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# Texas A&M University

## Department of Recreational Sports

### Breath Holding Policy

The Department of Recreational Sports **PROHIBITS** the practice of hyperventilating and extended breath holding activities in **ALL** Recreational Sports aquatic facilities.

#### **What it hyperventilating & extended breath holding:**

Hyperventilation is a series of deep breaths followed by forced exhalation prior to breath-holding. This is done in an attempt to remain underwater for a longer period of time. This works because it decreases the level of CO<sub>2</sub> in the blood. CO<sub>2</sub> is responsible for triggering the need to breathe. With less CO<sub>2</sub> a swimmer will not feel a need to take a breath as quickly and can remain under water longer. This, however, does not mean that the swimmer does not need oxygen. Oxygen levels are being depleted. In fact, oxygen levels can be depleted more quickly if the swimmer is moving or swimming rather than remaining stationary. If oxygen levels in the blood drop sufficiently before CO<sub>2</sub> levels trigger the need to breathe, the swimmer will become unconscious. This is also commonly referred to as shallow water blackout. Obviously, an unconscious swimmer will breathe water into their lungs and will die if not rescued and resuscitated.

#### **What National Governing Agencies say about hyperventilation & breath holding:**

##### The American Red Cross:

"Refers to hyperventilation in its Swimming and Water Safety text as "potentially dangerous" and "risky" The American Red Cross's Lifeguarding text also refers to how hyperventilation can result in a passive drowning victim and that patrons should be directed not to engage in prolonged breath-holding (greater than 30 seconds)."

##### The American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches:

"A dangerous practice that may result in drowning."

##### The medical advisory committee of the YMCA of the USA:

"YMCAs should prohibit extended underwater breath-holding."

##### The Department of Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) of the U.S. Navy:

"This practice of hyperventilating and extended breath holding is prohibited at MWR aquatic facilities."

*(source: Sperling, Judith, McGregor & Associates SportRisk, April 7, 2011)*