



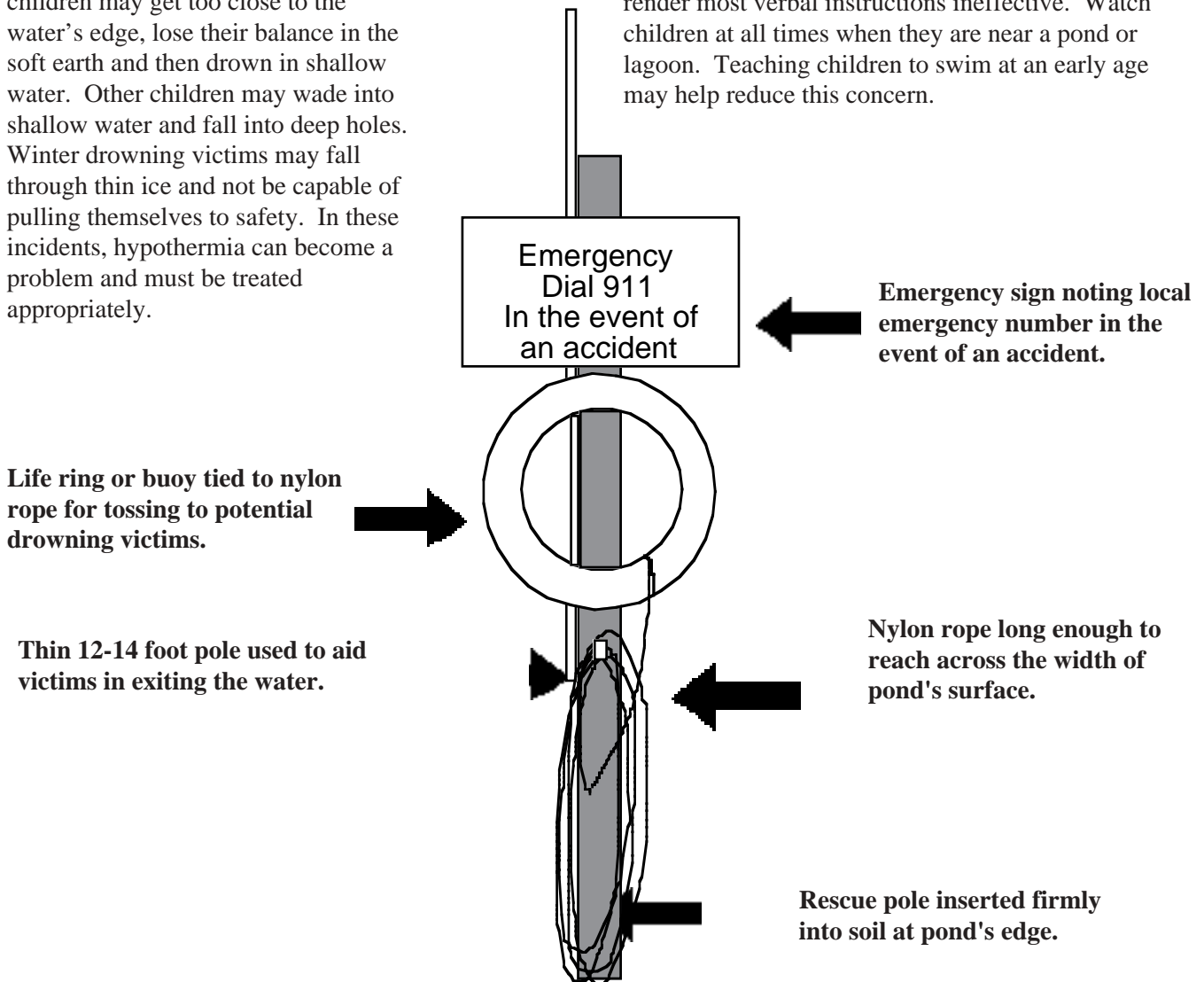
## Farm Pond Safety

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**F**arm ponds, lagoons and water wells are often found on Pennsylvania farms and all have contributed to accidental drownings. Most victims range in age from toddlers to young adults and sometimes are not residents of the farm where the incident occurred.

Children under the age of four make up the largest group of victims in farm pond drownings. Small children may get too close to the water's edge, lose their balance in the soft earth and then drown in shallow water. Other children may wade into shallow water and fall into deep holes. Winter drowning victims may fall through thin ice and not be capable of pulling themselves to safety. In these incidents, hypothermia can become a problem and must be treated appropriately.

Lack of close supervision, underestimating the curiosity of children, and adults who overestimate their child's sense of judgment all contribute to young children drowning in farm ponds. Even though a child verbally acknowledges a warning or word of caution, this does not mean that they understand the hazard or risk of farm ponds. Children's short attention span, plus the attractiveness of pond water as a play area, render most verbal instructions ineffective. Watch children at all times when they are near a pond or lagoon. Teaching children to swim at an early age may help reduce this concern.



Adults are also drowning victims in farm ponds. Data show that accidents most often occur when people use farm ponds for recreational swimming. Most victims are in their late teens or early twenties and are visitors on the farm. Sharp drop-offs on the pond floor and leg cramps may cause even good swimmers to experience problems. Multiple deaths have occurred when one person attempts to rescue another individual who is in trouble.

There are other dangers associated with farm ponds, including contamination by agricultural fertilizer and pesticide runoff. Livestock waste and other pollutants present special health problems. If the water is cloudy, has a foul odor, or is covered with algae, it should not be used for swimming, because of possible human infectious agents. Ponds used for swimming should be sampled every spring for water quality by a certified laboratory. Other dangers lurking beneath farm pond surfaces include jagged rocks, broken bottles, animal bones, and other miscellaneous items common to farm ponds.

In general, it is recommended that all ponds and lagoons be fenced and posted with No Trespassing signs to keep trespassers out. Non-posted, non-fenced ponds increase the risk of a lawsuit if uninvited swimmers are injured or drown. Restrict entrance to your pond to keep out uninvited guests.

To make your farm pond safe for swimming, eliminate all physical hazards. This may include: grading of slopes for easy entrance; dragging shallow areas for dangerous objects; marking drop-offs; and roping off unsafe areas. Use markers and signs to identify the depth of the pond at different spots.



*"Kids will be kids." Children playing around farm ponds is a common occurrence often resulting in a tragedy.*

Every farm pond used for swimming should have a rescue post inserted firmly in the ground near the water's edge. Secure a nylon rope to the post which is long enough to reach across the pond. Attach one end of the rope to a buoy and the other end to a wood block. Then hang these on the rescue post. A gallon plastic milk jug containing a pint of water can also serve as a buoy. A thin, 12-14 foot pole should also be kept at the rescue post for assisting victims out of the pond. A sign printed with emergency phone numbers should also be attached to the rescue post.

Individuals should never swim alone even if they are expert swimmers. Persons who swim in farm ponds should be trained on water rescue procedures and CPR, similar to those taught by the American Red Cross and other swimming instruction programs.

Some farm drownings result from falls into wells, particularly those no longer in use. When abandoned, most wells are covered by wooden planks or other types of capping devices. Wooden planks may rot over a period of time and caps may get removed for a variety of reasons. Sometimes older children or pranksters will open up wells not realizing the seriousness of these actions. Old wells should have solid covers which cannot be easily removed and they should be checked regularly. It may be practical to fence off a well to keep children away. The safest bet is to remove the hazard by filling an old well with concrete or fill material.



*Parents and other adults should take the time to educate their children about the dangers associated with ponds and structures holding liquids on farms.*

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