

Lifesavers

When we picture a beach in summer, we see swimmers, sunbathers, kids playing in the sand, and a long line of lifeguard towers. What we probably don't know is that the companies that staff these lifeguard towers have rules about under what circumstances lifeguards can save lives.

For example, John Ellis Management, a South Florida company, forbids lifeguards from leaving their posts to attend to swimmers in the water outside of the designated company zone. If alerted to an incident outside of the company's zone of protection, lifeguards are instructed to call 911. However, in July 2012, lifeguard Tomas Lopez noticed a drowning man about 1500 feet outside of his zone and sprang into action. By the time Lopez pulled the victim out of the water, he'd already turned blue.

Even though Lopez had secured another lifeguard to take his post while he rescued the victim, JEM fired Lopez almost immediately. Three lifeguards quit out of protest and two were fired for stating they would have done the same thing. The company later agreed to hire them all back although it defended its actions citing liability issues. According to the contract JEM offers its employees, lifeguards agree to protect a certain area and that if they leave this area to go to an unprotected zone, they are no longer doing their jobs. Furthermore, the unprotected area is clearly marked with signs warning swimmers to swim at their own risk.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should company policy forbid lifeguards from helping people outside of the designated area?
Does the lifeguard have a primary duty to his assigned 'area,' or to all swimmers?