

International Life Saving Federation



International Standards

for

Beach Safety and Information Flags

Approved by the Board of Directors 20 February 2004

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1. Overview

- 1.1. Flags are traditional devices for providing information to beach and water users which, if properly utilised, can be an effective element of a comprehensive safety system. Flags should only be used for waters normally designated for aquatic activity
- 1.2. These international standards have been developed by the International Life Saving Federation (ILS) by adopting and adapting the ‘best practise’ exercised by member federations from throughout the world.
- 1.3. International standardisation of beach safety flags can be expected to greatly improve understanding of water users with respect to beach conditions and rules, particularly when visiting countries other than their own. It will reduce language barriers. This standardisation can therefore be expected to reduce the likelihood of death and injury, furthering the primary goal of ILS: *world water safety* ©.
- 1.4. Development of these standards has involved acknowledgement and acceptance of the most widely used flag systems. This has resulted in a standard likely to cause the least possible disruption to existing systems and to ease the process of international standardisation.
- 1.5. Flags may help reduce the incidence of injury and drowning, but cannot assist those in distress. Therefore, these flags are only to be used on beaches where lifesavers qualified to ILS standards are on duty. Flags are not an acceptable substitute for properly trained and equipped rescuers, but rather a tool for their use.
- 1.6. Use of the flags described in these standards is encouraged, but not required of ILS member federations or their affiliated organisations. An organisation may choose to fly none, some, or all of the flags described here. All beach safety organisations worldwide are strongly discouraged from flying flags that conflict with these standards, as this could lead to public confusion and offset the value of international standardisation.

2. Scope – The primary purpose of the safety flags included in these standards is to provide safety information and related messages to users of aquatic facilities and environs. These standards set out the range of flags that might be used to identify conditions for wind, weather, water, and for a beach, and to identify designated zones for various aquatic activities. These standards include the possible locations for the flags at a coastline and for inland waters.

3. Terms and definitions

- 3.1. *risk* – combination of the probability of occurrence of harm and the severity of that harm
- 3.2. *hazard* – potential source of harm
- 3.3. *danger* – signal word used to indicate an imminently hazardous situation which, if not avoided, will result in death or serious injury

- 3.4. *caution* – signal word used to indicate a potentially hazardous situation which, if not avoided, may result in minor or moderate injury
- 3.5. *safety colour* – specific colour to which a safety meaning is attributed
- 3.6. *colour code* – colours used to communicate a particular meaning
- 3.7. *safety symbol* – graphical symbol used together with a safety colour and safety shape to form a safety sign
- 3.8. *graphical symbol* – visually perceptible figure with a particular meaning to transmit information independently of language
- 3.9. *visibility* – relative possibility of being visually perceived under the conditions of distance, light and atmosphere prevailing at a particular time
- 3.10. *observation distance* – greatest distance from which a flag is legible and conspicuous
- 3.11. *high location* – installation position at a level not less than 2 metres above ground level
- 3.12. *ageing* – change of properties that occurs in materials with time after environmental conditioning
- 3.13. *beach safety flags* – an item of coloured fabric or synthetic material, of an oblong or square shape, attached by one edge to a pole or rope and used to give a safety message
4. Procedures for standards development – Before the creation of a new beach safety flag is considered by ILS the following procedure shall be carried out:
 - 4.1. A written proposal providing detailed rationale is made to the International Life Saving Federation Rescue and Education Commission by any interested party.
 - 4.2. A review of the proposal is conducted by the Rescue and Education Commission.
 - 4.3. The Rescue and Education Commission shall approve, disapprove, or modify the proposal.
 - 4.4. Any modification to these standards shall first be circulated for comment to all ILS member federations providing at least 180 days for comment.
 - 4.5. The Rescue and Education Commission shall review all comment received and take action it deems appropriate.
 - 4.6. To become effective, any substantive modification to the standards must first be approved by the ILS Board of Directors.

5. Types of beach safety flags

- 5.1. Yellow – Medium hazard. Moderate surf and/or currents are present. Weak swimmers are discouraged from entering the water. For others, enhanced care and caution should be exercised.
- 5.2. Red – High hazard. Rough conditions such as strong surf and/or currents are present. All swimmers are discouraged from entering the water. Those entering the water should take great care.
- 5.3. Double red – Water is closed to public use.
- 5.4. Purple – Marine pests, such as jellyfish, stingrays, sea snakes or other marine life which can cause minor injuries are present in the water. This flag is not intended to indicate the presence of sharks. In this latter case the red flag or double red flag may be hoisted.
- 5.5. Red/yellow (halved red over yellow) – The area is protected by lifeguards. These flags may be used in pairs spaced apart to indicate a designated area or zone along a beach or waterfront that is most closely supervised or patrolled by qualified lifeguards, and where swimming and/or body surfing is permitted. These flags may be used singly to indicate that swimming is permitted in front of the area where the flag is flown and that the area is under the supervision of a qualified person
- 5.6. Quartered (black/white) – These flags may be used in pairs spaced apart to indicate a designated area or zone along a beach or waterfront that is used by those with surfboards and other non-powered watercraft.
- 5.7. Yellow flag with central black ball – Surfboards and other non-powered watercraft are prohibited.
- 5.8. Orange windsock – This cone shaped device is used to indicate the direction of offshore winds and to show that it is unsafe for inflatable objects to be used in the water.

6. Supplementary text information

- 6.1. To ensure water users and members of the public are aware of the meaning of flags, beach users should be informed through signs, brochures, or similar means. The text may be fixed to the flagpole, or indicated on an information board or facility at the entrance to an aquatic location.
- 6.2. The text should be as brief as possible and give the prime meaning of the flag when hoisted.
- 6.3. Consideration should be given to the erection of information boards/notices, particularly at the entry points to aquatic locations. The information contained should include detail of the meaning of flags, locations and times of operation. This information may also be included in 'tourist' leaflets and publicity material.

7. Guidance for the operation of beach safety flags

- 7.1. Flags should only be selected and utilised by the persons defined in section 1.5 based on their knowledge and expertise
- 7.2. The flags should be attached by any reasonable means to poles, and erected so that the lowest point of the flag is not less than 2 metres above the immediate ground level. They should be positioned so that they can be readily seen by persons in or approaching the aquatic area or location. Flags should not be obstructed by other structures or by natural flora and fauna.
- 7.3. Except for the double red flag, yellow, and red flags shall not be flown at the same time. They are intended to indicate general conditions for the entire beach area, not for a particular area of beach.
- 7.4. As circumstances change, flags should be changed accordingly.
- 7.5. Flags used to zone a section of beach or water activity should be moved to suitable locations as changing conditions dictate.
- 7.6. Flags flown to provide information and/or instruction about such factors as prohibition of watercraft, offshore winds, or to identify an activity boundary should be removed when not required.
- 7.7. Because of the need to be present to monitor the conditions, and possibly to change flags, these systems should only operate during a prescribed and well publicised period each day. The presence of these systems may also relate to seasonal activity.
- 7.8. It is important that flags and particularly flagpoles should not become a hazard. Therefore the responsible location for placing flags should receive careful consideration at any planning stage.
- 7.9. Flags and flagpoles should be properly maintained. Flags have a limited lifespan, particularly in adverse weather conditions. Flags should be replaced once they become torn or faded.

8. Design specifications – All flags are 750mm by 1000 mm and may be made of polyester or other suitable material.

Flag	Meaning	Pantone (PMS)	Shape
Yellow	Medium hazard	PMS – 123	Rectangle
Red	High hazard	PMS – 186	Rectangle
Red over red	Water closed to public use	PMS – 186	Rectangles
Purple	Marine pests present	PMS – 266	Rectangle
Red over yellow	Recommended swimming area with lifeguard supervision	PMS – 186 PMS – 123	Rectangle with equal, parallel halves.
Quartered	Watercraft area	PMS – 6 (black)	Rectangular flag with four equal rectangular quarters. Black upper left and lower right. White upper right and lower left.
Black ball	Watercraft use prohibited (e.g. no surfboards)	PMS – 123 (yellow) PMS- (black)	Rectangular yellow flag with central black ball shape, 500mm dia.
Orange windsock	Offshore winds present, inflatables should not be used	PMS – 165	Cone shape 500mm at the hoist-tapering to 300mm x 1500mm long