

You May Have Fewer Options to Wade in the Water This Summer as Thousands of Lifeguard Chairs Are Left Unoccupied



A national lifeguard shortage could be standing in the way of your summer plans.

Public pools and beaches are at risk of being dangerously understaffed after people left the lifeguarding profession due to a lack of work during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the pandemic “wiped the slate of certified lifeguards completely clean,” the director of health and safety at the lifeguard association, Bernard J. Fisher II, told Axios.

Although pandemic restrictions have waned, trained lifeguards haven’t returned to their posts, which may force public wading

areas to be shut down over safety concerns. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reported an upward trend in nonfatal drowning injuries since 2020.

“We’re experiencing a critical national lifeguard shortage, with over 309,000 parks and pools (total in the country) over half of them will see closures or reduction in hours,” spokesperson for the American Lifeguard Association Wyatt Werneth told Fox Business.

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For scale, Werneth, who was chief lifeguard in Brevard County, Fla. over a decade ago, said that over 100 people applied for two available beach lifeguard positions back then but this year only two people showed up for training with 50 positions needing to be filled, he told NPR in an interview.

According to the outlet, the shift in dynamic is likely due to the rigorous training and responsibility it takes to be a lifeguard and low pay. The average lifeguard salary in the United States is between \$9.72 and \$22.18 an hour, Indeed reported.

Still, pay may not be the main culprit. New York City raised its lifeguard salary by 9% and added a sign-on bonus, but the metropolis is only staffed with a third of the lifeguards it needs for public beaches and pools, per CBS News.

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Other major cities including Indianapolis, Phoenix, and Philadelphia have also taken the initiative to increase pay and training.

But while cities are desperate for lifeguards, Werneth warns

that the job comes with great responsibility.

"It is more than just a summer job," Werneth told CBS. "Lifeguards have a unique advantage of letting people know there's a danger and to stay out of that danger."

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