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**THE SCOTSMAN**  
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The lifeguard swims for the surface, carrying the girl. She was resuscitated at the poolside and has made a full recovery. Picture: PA

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**Pool's cameras save a young girl's life**

EDWARD BLACK

THESE are the dramatic pictures that show a young girl being saved from drowning.

The ten-year-old, who had drifted, unconscious and unnoticed, to the bottom of a busy public swimming pool, was rescued after lifeguards were alerted by a hi-tech underwater camera system.

Within 40 seconds of her plunging more than 12ft, one of four underwater safety cameras spotted the girl and alerted lifeguards via a pager message. A lifeguard dived into the water and pulled the girl to safety.

The incident, at Bangor swimming pool, in North Wales, is thought to be the first time a UK swimmer has been saved by the £65,000 camera safety system, called Poseidon.

The unnamed girl, who fell unconscious after plunging into the deep end,

was given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation after being rescued, and treated in hospital, but has made a full recovery since the incident on Wednesday last week.

The Poseidon system, which was fitted to the Bangor pool in March 2003, involves eight overhead and four underwater cameras. The technology can detect movement, trajectory and texture of underwater objects. It then compares images to a database of thousands of examples of swimmers in trouble.

If it finds a match, it alerts lifeguards using a pager message which also displays a diagram showing the location of the stricken swimmer.

The system has been fitted to eight UK pools and 120 worldwide.

Brian Evans, the head of leisure services on Gwynedd Council, said a victim who fell unconscious would not struggle or scream, making it hard for lifeguards.

He said: "The incident was what we would call a 'silent drowning'. The girl did not struggle or scream, and there was also no visible occurrence that caused her to lose consciousness.

"She just jumped into the water and drifted down to the bottom, as if she was going to sleep. That is the worst-case scenario for a lifeguard, and is exactly the sort of thing

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that Poseidon, our third eye, is there to deal with.

"The pool was very busy and the lifeguards were at full stretch. She may well owe her life to the system."

Mr Evans said Poseidon was introduced in Bangor because the pool is deep and has high surface glare, which reduces a lifeguard's view of the bottom.

He added: "The council was looking at reducing the depth of the pool, which would have meant removing the diving boards. We heard about Poseidon and realised it could provide the solution."

The girl comes from Roch-dale, Greater Manchester. She was believed to be in North Wales on a camping trip with a charitable foundation.

François Marmion, the general manager of Vision IQ, which developed Poseidon, said: "It is virtually impossible for lifeguards to see everything that is happening in the pool all of the time, given the warm, noisy and crowded environment in which they work.

"It took 40 seconds for Poseidon to alert the lifeguard to this girl. Thankfully she made a full recovery, but just a minute or so longer under the water and she would have suffered brain damage or died."

But not all swimming pools are planning to introduce the system. Neil Brown, the director of operations at Edinburgh Leisure, which runs the city's pools, said he already knew of the system.

He said: "We have considered this hi-tech option. However we prefer to rely on the expertise of our staff. We are aware that other pool operators may have utilised this system as a cost-cutting exercise in the replacement of their pool lifeguards, but we believe that it is more reassuring to our customers to have visible, qualified lifeguards at all times.

"We believe in the prevention of incidents rather than simply reacting to them - therefore such an option can never replace the experienced lifeguard. Edinburgh Leisure has an excellent reputation for our standard of lifeguarding, having been awarded commendation from the Royal Lifesaving Society in recent years."

David Walker, from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, said: "Our view is that anything that will help a lifeguard who, on a sunny day, may struggle to pick out someone drowning, is a good thing. It is a good and quite expensive alarm system. But until it can get wet and do a rescue then it is no replacement for a good team of lifeguards. You still need experienced and qualified lifeguards to do a job."

According to the Health and Safety Executive, there are an average of 41 reported incidents per year in British swimming pools that result in major injury or death. Many of these incidents occur in pools that are supervised by qualified life- guards.

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