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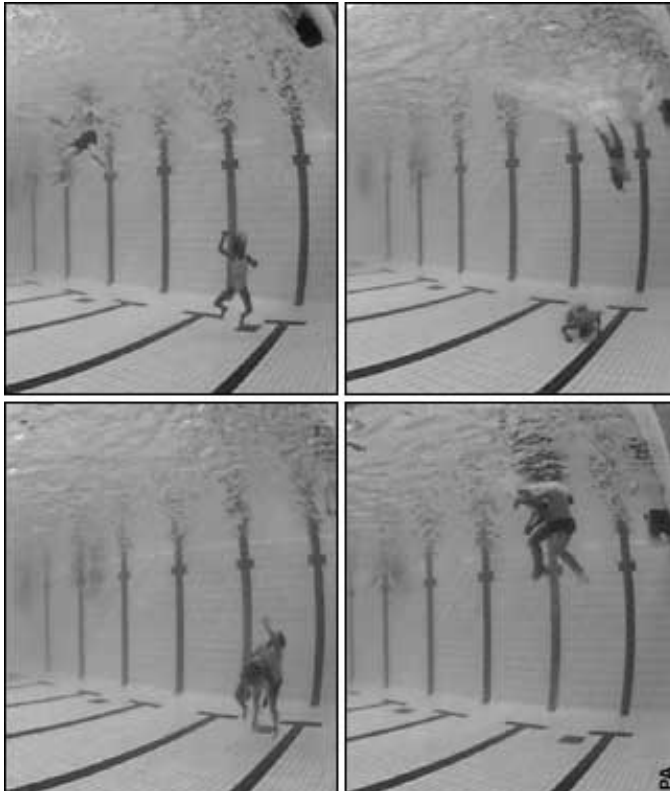
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Underwater cameras save pool girl from drowning

By Nigel Bunyan
(Filed: 01/09/2005)

A 10-year-old girl has become the first person in Britain to be saved from drowning by a computer system.

The child was plucked from the bottom of a public swimming pool after the computer's sophisticated software realized she had stopped moving.



The girl is seen sinking to the bottom of the pool, triggering an alert that sends a lifeguard to the rescue

The system, which uses 12 cameras, four of them underwater, to monitor swimmers, sent an alert to the five lifeguards on duty at the pool in Bangor, North Wales, and one of them dived in to save her. The entire incident took 62 seconds.

Once at the poolside the child was given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and later taken to the town's Gwynedd Hospital. She was released the following day, feeling "perfectly fine".

The French-designed Poseidon system was installed two years ago. It is designed to act as a "third eye" to help lifeguards to spot a swimmer in trouble. Its cameras are linked to computer software that searches for inconsistencies in swimmers' movements.

In the case of the 10-year-old girl, her vertical descent into the deep end and her immobility as she lay face down on the bottom were monitored. After 10 seconds of

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inactivity, the system sounded an alert at a poolside console.

Karen Gibson, the lifeguard who pulled her out of the water, said: "I dived in as soon as the alert sounded. I just grabbed her and brought her to the surface as soon as I could."

Mrs Gibson, 26, a mother of two, said: "She was unconscious and I thought she had died. But then, after maybe 30 seconds [of resuscitation], she started coughing. We gave her oxygen and then the paramedics arrived and took over."

Brian Evans, a leisure officer with Gwynedd Council, which runs the pool, was delighted that the £60,000 system had done its job.

"We installed it because the pool is a typically 1960s design with lots of windows and, therefore, lots of glare. It's also very deep at 12ft 6in," he said.

"On this occasion it spotted her more quickly than the human eye. If she had been any longer in the water her heart would have stopped."

Mr Evans has so far failed to trace the child. She is thought to have been brought to the pool by members of a charitable trust.

Pool staff are anxious to identify her so that they can discover how and why she got into difficulty.

Mr Evans said: "I am mystified as to how she sank to the bottom without any struggle or any signs of distress. She was just silently drowning at the bottom of the pool."

Poseidon, which was developed by Vision IQ, has been installed in more than 100 swimming pools across the world. It has previously been credited with saving the lives of two swimmers in France and another in Germany.

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