



USMS Open Water Swimwear Rule Summary for 2026

The following summary is based on Article 303.4, Swimwear for Open Water Events, USMS 2026 Rule Book. For the full text, visit <http://www.usms.org/rules/part3.pdf>.

Rules that Apply to All Swimwear Categories

1. Must be non-transparent and conform to the current concept of the appropriate.
2. No advertising for tobacco, alcohol, or IOC/FINA banned substances allowed. The manufacturer's name is allowed.
3. No tape on body unless approved by the Referee.
4. Cap or caps (including those made of neoprene, but in water less than 78° F. only), goggles, nose clips, ear plugs, and wristwatches are allowed.
5. Event hosts may allow (or even require) personal buoys—tow floats, not pull buoys, see below—for identification & safety. Requirements for buoys & rules for their use must be included in the meet information.

Rules for Category I Swimwear (Required for USMS Open Water Championships)

1. The competitor shall wear only one swimsuit in one or two pieces made from textile materials and not contain zippers or clasps, but may have ties that fasten at the swimmer's waist and on the swimmer's back. Women's swimwear that ties in the back are acceptable.
2. For both men and women, the swimsuit shall not cover the neck, extend past the shoulder, nor extend below the ankles.
3. Not legal for Category I:
 - a. Any device or substance to help speed, pace, navigation, buoyancy, endurance (such as wetsuits, pull buoys, paddles, webbed gloves, fins, snorkels, buoyant armbands, audio players, etc.) or maintaining body heat (except neoprene caps as noted above).
 - b. Arm & leg bands are not regarded as part of the swimsuit and are not allowed.
 - c. Tape or flat non-buoyant armbands must be approved by the Referee.
4. Exemptions may be made on a case-by-case basis.

Rules for Category II Swimwear (formerly wetsuit category)

1. Swimwear that does not meet the requirements for Category I swimwear shall be considered Category II swimwear.
2. Swimwear may also include wetsuit, arm & leg bands, and rash guards. Use of grease is allowed.

3. Wetsuits or any other heat-retaining swimwear may be allowed at the discretion of the event director when the water temperature does not exceed 78° F.
4. Swimmers may not wear or use any additional device or substance to help speed, pace, navigation, buoyancy, or endurance (such as webbed gloves, pull buoys, paddles, fins, snorkels, audio players, etc.), except in designated events where all swimmers may use similar devices or substances.
5. Tape or flat non-buoyant armbands must be approved by the Referee.