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www.FloridaDisaster.org

ELEVATED RISK OF RIP CURRENTS ALONG FLORIDA PANHANDLE AND GULF COAST
~All beachgoers should check beach warning flags before swimming~

TALLAHASSEE – Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) officials remind residents and visitors to use caution at the beach this week, as an elevated risk of rip currents is expected along the Florida Panhandle and Gulf Coast through Wednesday. A high risk of rip currents is expected in Walton and Bay counties today, as well as along the Sun Coast from Pinellas to Collier County. Remaining portions of the Florida Gulf Coast will see a moderate risk of rip currents.

“Strong winds over the Gulf of Mexico will generate an elevated risk of rip currents for the Florida Gulf Coast,” said FDEM Deputy State Meteorologist Michelle Palmer. “It is important for all beachgoers to check the beach warning flags before swimming and to swim within sight of a lifeguard. Floridians can check their local rip current outlook at www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov.”

Beachgoers should always remain alert while visiting Florida’s beaches, especially when red flags are flying. A rip current is a narrow, powerful current of water that runs perpendicular to the beach, out into the ocean.

When at the beach:
- Before you leave for the beach, check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach conditions. Many offices issue a Surf Zone Forecast.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards. Lifeguards are trained to identify hazards.
- Know the meaning of and obey warnings represented by colored beach flags. Different beaches may use different colors but a commonly used series include:
  - Double Red: Beach is closed to the public
  - Single Red: high hazard, e.g., strong surf or currents
  - Yellow: medium hazard
  - Green: Calm conditions although caution is still necessary
  - Purple: Flown with either Red or Yellow: Dangerous marine life
- Stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist alongside these structures.
- Pay especially close attention to children and persons who are elderly when at the beach. Even in shallow water, wave action can cause loss of footing.
- Be cautious. Always assume rip currents are present even if you don’t see them.

If caught in a rip current:
- DON’T PANIC. Remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- NEVER swim against the rip. Stay afloat and signal for help.
- Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim at an angle--away from the current--towards shore.
- If you are unable to swim out of the rip current, float or calmly tread water.
- Draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.
If you see someone in trouble, don't become a victim too:

- Get help from a lifeguard or, if one is unavailable, have someone call 9-1-1.
- Throw the rip current victim something that floats—a lifejacket, a cooler, an inflatable ball.
- Yell instructions on how to escape.

To learn more about severe weather in Florida, and to Get A Plan!, visit www.FloridaDisaster.org, and follow FDEM on Twitter at @FLSERT, on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/FloridaSERT and on Google+ at FLSERT.

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