



STATE OF FLORIDA

DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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January 30-February 3, 2012

Florida's Severe Weather Awareness Week takes place from January 30-February 3, 2012. Severe Weather Awareness Week is an important opportunity for Floridians to learn about the different weather hazards that frequently impact the state and how families and businesses can prepare for these natural events.

Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Tuesday's focus is Marine Hazards and Rip Currents.**

Florida's beaches attract millions of residents and tourists each year. However, while there may be beautiful weather in the sky, there can be unseen dangers in the water.

Rip currents, often erroneously referred to as rip tides or undertows, occur naturally and affect many Florida beaches year-round. Each year, rip currents cause an average of 10 fatalities; noteworthy because this average is higher than that of hurricane, tornado or lightning related fatalities. Many of these incidents occur on days when the weather is pleasant, with a nice breeze blowing onshore. This catches beachgoers by surprise since fair weather is usually associated with pleasant ocean conditions.

DID YOU KNOW? Rip currents are much more localized than rip tides and undertows and are typically shorter in duration than an incoming or outgoing astronomical tide. It is important to understand that rip currents do not pull people under the water; instead they carry people out towards deeper water.

Rip currents typically form along the beach at breaks in the near-shore underwater sandbar, but they also form near structures such as jetties and piers. Typically, onshore winds and waves push water over the sandbar, allowing excess water to collect between the bar and the beach. Eventually, this excess water starts to return seaward through low spots in the sandbar, "ripping" an opening. While rip currents can happen on any day of the year, weather or ocean conditions can cause rip currents to be stronger and more frequent on some days more than on others.

Rip currents are dangerous because they can pull unprepared swimmers away from shore and into deeper offshore waters. They become especially dangerous when swimmers panic and struggle

(MORE)

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against the current while being pulled farther and farther away from the beach. The force of a rip current is too strong for even the strongest of swimmers, and attempts to swim directly back toward shore, especially for the panicked and tired swimmer, can be fatal.

***DID YOU KNOW?** Rip currents can travel as fast as five mph, or about eight feet per second, which is faster than an Olympic swimmer can swim!*

Florida's Atlantic and Gulf coasts also attract plenty of boating enthusiasts year-round and Florida leads the nation with nearly one million registered boats. Before venturing out on the water, it is important that boaters check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach and boating conditions. Stay in port if thunderstorms are expected.

Be prepared to seek safe shelter anytime lightning is seen or thunder is heard and never let thunderstorms cut off your route back to land. Be sure everyone aboard is wearing a life jacket as gusty thunderstorm winds or waterspouts can quickly overturn small boats. If lightning is nearby, get low or head below deck, and stay away from masts and ungrounded metal objects. If caught near a waterspout, take evasive action by moving at a 90 degree angle from its apparent movement. Then, seek safe harbor if possible.

National Weather Service offices around Florida issue a surf zone forecast and coastal waters forecasts each day, which includes the expected rip current risk and marine conditions.

- NWS forecasts are a primary tool for planning a safe day on the water.
- At the beach, look for the nearest lifeguards and check with them about existing water conditions, and on beaches with no lifeguard on duty, look for warning flags or signs.
- If you find yourself caught in a rip current, don't panic and don't fight the current.
- Swim in a direction parallel to the shoreline either toward your left or right. Just remembering the simple phrase "**Don't fight...Swim left or right**" could save your life. When free of the current, swim at an angle back toward shore.

National Safe Boating Week is May 19 – 25, 2012. Rip Current Safety Week is June 3 – 9, 2012.

For more information on Rip Currents and Marine Hazards, and what you can do to protect yourself and others can be found at www.RipCurrents.noaa.gov and www.FloridaDisaster.org.

Wednesday's focus is on Tornadoes and Thunderstorms.

The National Weather Service and Florida's Division of Emergency Management will conduct a Statewide Tornado Drill at 10:10 AM EST, (9:10 AM CST), on Wednesday, February 1, 2012.

For more information on the Statewide Tornado Drill, the Florida Division of Emergency Management and to GET A PLAN!, please visit: www.FloridaDisaster.org. Follow us on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/FLSERT and on Facebook at: <http://www.Facebook.com/FloridaSERT>.

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