



STATE OF FLORIDA

DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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ELEVATED RISK OF RIP CURRENTS EXPECTED TODAY FOR FLORIDA GULF AND ATLANTIC COAST BEACHES

TALLAHASSEE- - Florida Division of Emergency Management officials are reminding beachgoers to use caution as strong onshore winds along the Panhandle, Peninsula Gulf Coast, and Atlantic Coast will bring rough surf and an elevated risk of rip currents today. Along the Emerald Coast, from Escambia County through Gulf County there is a high risk of rip currents. These same strong winds will result in a moderate risk of rip currents along the beaches of the Peninsula Gulf Coast, from Pinellas County through Lee County, and also along most of the Atlantic Coast from Nassau County southward through Palm Beach County. Those traveling to the beach need to be aware that when red flags are flying, swimming in Florida's coastal waters can be dangerous.

"All along the Panhandle Coast, strong, gusty onshore winds are creating rough surf and large breaking waves of up to three to five feet," said Michelle Palmer, Deputy State Meteorologist. "These conditions are expected to cause frequent rip currents from Escambia County through Gulf County. It is important that beach-goers around the state check the rip current outlook, swim near lifeguards and remember the beach warning flag system before entering the surf."

A rip current is a narrow, powerful current of water that runs perpendicular to the beach, out into the ocean. These currents may extend 200 to 2,500 feet (61 to 762 meters) lengthwise, but they are typically less than 30 feet (9 meters) wide. Also, rip currents can often move at more than five miles per hour (eight kilometers per hour) or faster and are not always identifiable to the average beachgoer.

When at the beach:

- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard-protected beach.
- Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches.
- Pay attention to beach warning flags and know what the colors mean.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards. Lifeguards are trained to identify hazards. Ask a lifeguard about the conditions before entering the water. This is part of their job.
- Learn how to swim in the surf. It's not the same as swimming in a pool or lake. Also, never swim alone.
- Stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist alongside these structures.
- Consider using polarized sunglasses when at the beach. They will help you to spot signatures of rip currents by cutting down glare and reflected sunlight off the ocean's surface.
- 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.

(MORE)

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If caught in a rip current:

- Remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Never fight against the current.
- Think of a rip current like a treadmill that cannot be turned off, which you need to step to the side of.
- 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. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself by waving your arm and yelling for help.

If you see someone in trouble, don't become a victim too:

- Get help from a lifeguard.
- If a lifeguard is not available, 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.
- Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.

Follow safe boating practices:

- Have a VHF Marine Band Radio and NOAA Weather Radio on board.
- Check the marine forecast well ahead of time.
- Know the limitations of your boat. If small craft advisories or gale warnings are issued, you should postpone travel.
- Be sure everyone aboard is wearing a life jacket.
- File a float plan at your marina.
- Thunderstorms and weather-related hazards form quickly. Never let these storms cut off your route back to land.

Beachgoers who want to learn more about rip currents can visit www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov. Boaters can go to www.srh.noaa.gov/wml to check the current marine conditions and updated forecasts. For more information on 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 www.Facebook.com/FloridaSERT.

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