A HIGH RISK OF RIP CURRENTS EXPECTED TODAY AND TUESDAY FOR FLORIDA PANHANDLE BEACHES

TALLAHASSEE—Florida Division of Emergency Management officials are reminding beachgoers in Walton, Bay, Gulf and Franklin Counties to use extreme caution as a high risk of rip currents is expected today and tomorrow. When red flags are flying, beachgoers need to be aware that swimming in the Gulf of Mexico can be dangerous. A moderate risk of rip currents will be in place along the Peninsula Gulf Coast, from Levy County southward through Lee County through tomorrow, and also along Florida’s East Coast from Nassau County to Miami-Dade County today.

“Strong westerly winds will develop in the wake of a cold front today and this will generate rough ocean conditions with breaking waves reaching heights up to four to six feet along the Emerald Coast and the Western Big Bend beaches,” said Deputy State Meteorologist Michelle Palmer. “These strong winds and rough surf will lead to a high rip current risk and minor beach erosion along this portion of the Northern Gulf Coast. Although it will be chilly outside, anyone who plans to enter the surf should check the warning flag signs before entering the water and swim within sight of a lifeguard.”

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 5 miles per hour (8 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.

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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](http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov). Boaters can go to [www.srh.noaa.gov/wml](http://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](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org). Follow us on Twitter at [www.Twitter.com/FLSERT](http://www.Twitter.com/FLSERT) and on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/FloridaSERT](http://www.Facebook.com/FloridaSERT).

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