



STATE OF FLORIDA

DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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HIGH RISK OF DANGEROUS RIP CURRENTS EXPECTED TODAY IN FRANKLIN, GULF, BAY AND WALTON COUNTIES

TALLAHASSEE- Florida Division of Emergency Management officials are urging beachgoers in Franklin, Gulf, Bay and Walton counties to use caution and heed local advisories today as a high risk of dangerous rip currents is expected along Panhandle beaches. When red flags are flying beachgoers need to be aware that swimming in the Gulf of Mexico can be dangerous.

"Beachgoers and surfers should be very cautious along area beaches today," Deputy State Meteorologist Amy Godsey said. "It is important to follow the advice of local officials and avoid entering the water where red flag warnings are posted."

A rip current is a powerful current of water running perpendicular to the beach, out into the ocean. Rip currents can extend outwards up to one-half mile and move at speeds of more than 5 miles per hour. They are dangerous because they can pull unprepared swimmers away from shore and into deeper waters.

Rip currents are responsible for about 150 deaths every year in the United States. In Florida, they kill more people annually than thunderstorms, hurricanes and tornadoes combined. According to the United States Lifesaving Association, 80 percent of surf beach rescues are attributed to rip currents.

Beachgoers should take the following precautionary and preparedness actions:

- Swim at guarded beaches and heed to the advice of beach patrol.
- If caught in the seaward pull of a rip current do not attempt to move directly toward shore. Instead move sideways across the rip currents until the pull eases.
- If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1.
- Throw the rip current victim something that floats: a lifejacket, a cooler or inflatable ball.
- Yell instructions on how to escape.
- Never go into the water alone, and if you aren't a strong swimmer, stick to shallow waters (though shallow waters can also be dangerous for weak swimmers).
- Only swim in areas with a lifeguard or strong swimmers on the beach who can keep a safe eye on you.

Beachgoers who want to learn more about rip currents can visit www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov. For more information on the Florida Division of Emergency Management and to GET A PLAN!, please visit: www.FloridaDisaster.org. For the latest weekly situation and flash reports go to: www.YouTube.com/FloridaSERT or join our blog at: <http://flsertinfo.blogspot.com/>.