



STATE OF FLORIDA

DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

CHARLIE CRIST
Governor

RUBEN D. ALMAGUER
Interim Director

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**CONTACT: MIKE STONE or
LESLIE D. STEELE**
(850) 413-9883
www.floridadisaster.org

HIGH RISK OF DANGEROUS RIP CURRENTS EXPECTED TODAY FOR GULF BEACHES FROM PINELLAS COUNTY SOUTH THROUGH LEE COUNTY

TALLAHASSEE- Florida Division of Emergency Management officials are urging beachgoers from Pinellas County south through Lee County to use caution today as a high risk of dangerous rip currents is expected along the Gulf Coast. There is also a moderate risk posted for Levy County south through Pasco County. When red flags are flying beachgoers need to be aware that swimming in the Gulf of Mexico can be dangerous.

"Beach conditions will be very rough and rip currents can be life threatening to anyone entering the water," Acting State Meteorologist Amy Godsey said. "We strongly urge beachgoers to check the rip current outlook and remember the warning flag signs before going into the water. Beachgoers should stay out of the water when red flags are flying."

A rip current is a narrow, powerful current of water running 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. Rip currents can often move at more than 5 miles per hour (8 kilometers per hour) or faster.

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. They are the number-one concern for beach lifeguards. According to the United States Lifesaving Association, 80 percent of surf beach rescues are attributed to rip currents.

When at the beach:

- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard-protected beach.
- Never swim alone.
- Learn how to swim in the surf. It's not the same as swimming in a pool or lake.
- Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards. Lifeguards are trained to identify potential hazards. Ask a lifeguard about the conditions before entering the water. This is part of their job.
- 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.

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- Pay especially close attention to children and elderly when at the beach. Even in shallow water, wave action can cause loss of footing.

If caught in a rip current:

- Remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Never fight against the current.
- Think of it 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.

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/> .

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