

RIP CURRENTS ... DON'T LET THEM CATCH YOU

During the summer months, many of us enjoy trips to the beach for fun in the sun. The Gulf is a wonderful playground, but we must respect its power. Rip currents are the leading surf hazard for all beachgoers. They are most dangerous for weak or non-swimmers. Over 100 drownings occur every year as a result of rip currents. Compared to 53 deaths from lightning strikes and 0.6 deaths from shark attacks each year, rip currents are certainly worthy of recognition.

Rip currents are formed when water is forced through a narrow path causing it to rush out to sea. Rip currents are frequently seen around jetties, groins, and other barriers, and can extend 1,000 feet offshore, reaching widths of 100 feet and speeds of up to three miles per hour (eight feet per second). This is faster than an Olympic swimmer can sprint. Thus, rip currents can pull even the most experienced swimmers out to sea.

Rip currents can be found on many surf beaches every day. Some rip currents are present only a few hours; others are permanent.

Telltale Signs of Rip Currents:

- A noticeable difference in water color (either murkier or darker);
- A difference in waves (larger, choppier waves in the rip current; smaller, calmer waves in front of the bar);
- Foam or objects moving steadily seaward;
- An offshore plume of turbid water past the sandbars.

A common myth about rip currents is that they pull people under water. Actually they don't. They pull people away from shore. Drowning occurs when people pulled offshore are no longer able to keep themselves afloat and swim to shore. This may be due to any combination of fear, panic, exhaustion, or lack of swimming skills.



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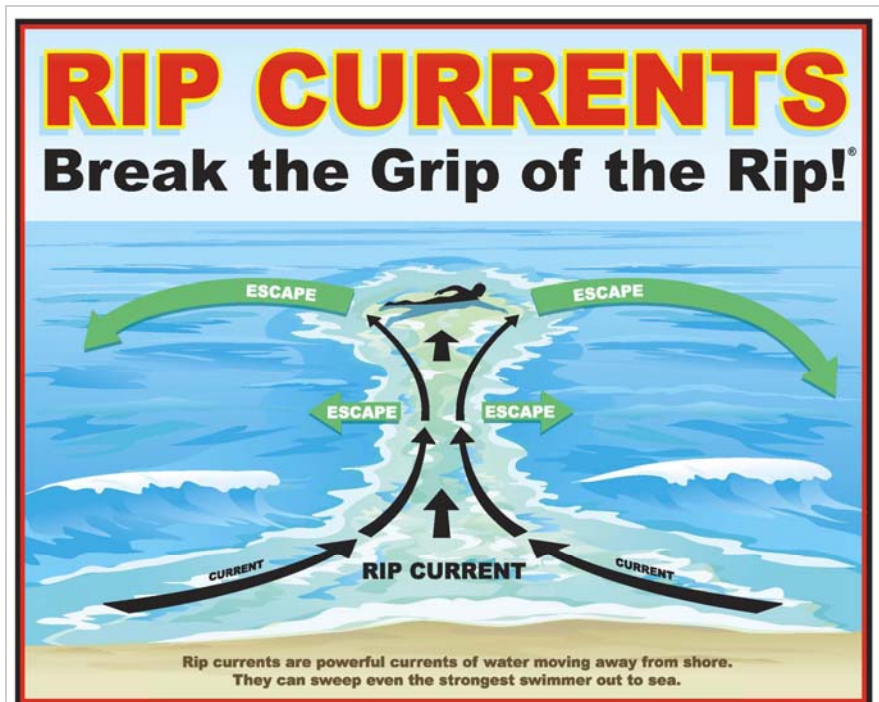
What To Do:

- If you find yourself caught in a rip current, most importantly, Don't Panic.
- Never swim against a rip current. Instead, swim parallel to shore until you are out of the current. Rip currents are rarely more than 30 feet wide. If you can't break free of the rip current, float calmly until the current dissipates, usually just beyond the breakers. Once free, swim diagonally to shore.
- If you're unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself by waving your arm and yelling for help.

Rip currents can be killers, so be safe, be smart, and know what to do.

Source: *Rip Currents: Don't Panic*, North Carolina Sea Grant

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IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT

- ◆ Don't fight the current
- ◆ Swim out of the current, then to shore
- ◆ If you can't escape, float or tread water
- ◆ If you need help, call or wave for assistance

SAFETY

- ◆ Know how to swim
- ◆ Never swim alone
- ◆ If in doubt, don't go out

More information about rip currents can be found at the following web sites:
www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov
www.usla.org



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