

Rip Currents

"I grew up swimming in the ocean and am very comfortable in it. One of my favorite pastimes in the ocean is diving under breakers and floating over swells. [Once], I dove under a wave... but when I surfaced and looked back over my shoulder, I was way out from the shore. I knew immediately what had happened. I tried swimming parallel to the shore, but was still in a very strong current and began to tire quickly.

Then a wave broke over my head, and I felt the panic rising. I know that panic is one's worst enemy in the water, so I floated and treaded water for a few minutes to catch my breath and relax. ...When I looked out to sea to keep an eye on the swells,...I realized that just a little further out, there were surfers.

[So] instead of trying to make it back to shore on my own, I turned and swam out to where they were. I told them what had happened and asked if one of them would allow me to accompany him into shore using his board as a boogie board for both of us. Of course, one of them agreed.

It took both of us to get far enough away from the current so we could paddle back into shore. I feel very fortunate that I recognized what had happened, knew not to panic, and was able to find a solution."

by Kathryn T. Graham

from the National Weather Service Rip Current Safety Web page
<http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/survivor.shtml>

What You Will Do

Demonstrate why swimmers caught in rip currents have to swim following the shoreline to escape

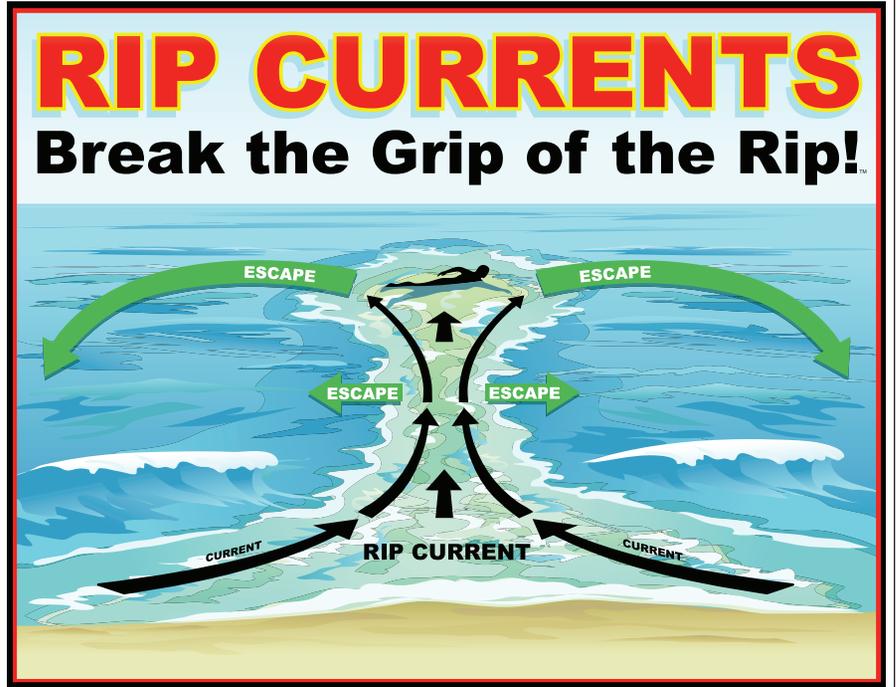
Rip currents are powerful, channeled currents of water flowing away from shore. They can occur at any beach with breaking waves, including many Great Lakes. These currents are killers. The United States Lifesaving Association estimates that every year, rip currents on our nation's beaches kill more than 100 people.

Here are some clues that a rip current may be present:

- A channel of churning, choppy water
- A difference in water color
- A line of foam, seaweed or debris moving out to sea
- A break in the incoming wave pattern

There are three basic safety rules for ocean swimming:

- Swim near a lifeguard
- Never swim alone
- If in doubt, don't go out



from a Rip Current Safety Poster by NOAA's National Weather Service, NOAA's National Sea Grant College Program, and the United States Lifesaving Association
http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/signs/rip_signs-r.pdf

If you are ever caught in a rip current:

- Relax and float, rip currents do not pull you under
- Don't swim against the current
- Swim in a direction following the shoreline, or toward breaking waves
- If you need help, call or wave your arms for assistance

What You Will Need

- Two or more strips of ribbon, rope or string, each at least ten feet long; if you have a choice, a blue color is good for representing ocean waves
- At least five people, including yourself

How to Do It

1. Have pairs of participants hold opposite ends of the rope or ribbon. You will need at least two pairs of participants to do the demonstration.
2. Designate one side of a room or outdoor space as the “shore” and the opposite side as “deep water.”
3. Have pairs of participants stand so that the rope or ribbon is stretched out, and is perpendicular to the shore. These participants and their ropes or ribbons represent waves.
4. Place a “trapped swimmer” participant in the “current” between two of the “waves.”
5. Have the “swimmer” walk toward the “deeper water,” as if being carried out by the current. The “trapped swimmer” can only escape by swimming in a direction following the shoreline until she or he is out of the rip current. Then he or she can use the waves to return safely to the beach.



Rip Current on Grand Avenue Beach
Courtesy of Chris Brewster, USLA



Beach View of Rip Current Along Jetty
Courtesy of Dr. Tom Herrington, Stevens Institute of Technology



Want to Do More?

- Find out more about rip currents and other beach hazards on NOAA’s rip current Web site at www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov.
- In coastal areas, many of NOAA’s National Weather Service Forecast Offices issue a Rip Current Outlook as a part of their Surf Zone Forecast. NOAA identifies days with forecasts for particularly dangerous rip currents with “High Risk of rip currents.” Visit: <http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/forecasts.shtml> to learn more.
- NWS National Seasonal Safety Campaign - National Weather Service:
NOAA NWS Weather Ready Nation Seasonal Safety Campaigns have replaced the awareness/preparedness weeks we had with the exception of a couple, one being Hurricane Preparedness Week.

The aim of the National Seasonal Safety Campaign is to build a Weather-Ready Nation, one that is prepared for extreme weather, water, and climate events. With the National Seasonal Safety Campaign, we seek to inform the public about seasonal weather hazards during the time they are most common.

<https://www.weather.gov/safetycampaign>

Close up of Rip Current
Courtesy of Lifeguard Captain Nick Steers,
County of Los Angeles Fire Department