



Ocean City Today – On Guard Safety Tips

by Kristin Joson



The writer has been working with the Beach Patrol for nine years. In the off-season, she is an Instructional Specialist in Charles County. The OCBP consist of over 200 men and women dedicated to ocean rescue and maintaining a safe and orderly environment on Ocean City's beach. The Surf Rescue Technicians guard the beach seven days a week from 10 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Life Guarding Isn't Just About the Rescue

Published August 17, 2012

Lifeguards are often required to make rescues, and the men and women of the Ocean City Beach Patrol are expertly trained to do just that. However, their job encompasses much more than the important skill of surf rescue. The guards are ambassadors for the Town of Ocean City. They work with and for the public to make Ocean City, an All-America City, the best ocean vacation destination on the East Coast.

Guards are not only expected to keep a vigilant eye over swimmers and patrons, but they are also called upon to perform many tasks that some people might think are not at all.

Guards act as educators to their patrons. Every day the guards call people on the beach and in their water over to

their stand to inform them about the current water, beach and weather conditions. These "safety talks" inform and educate the public on a daily basis about how to keep themselves and their families safe. Additionally each guard writes important information about conditions and tides on the sign that is on the back of every lifeguard stand.

Guards are expected to maintain a safe and orderly beach by enforcing all laws and ordinances. Although watching the ocean is their primary responsibility they are also responsible for everything that is taking place on their assigned beach, which extends between the guards stands on both sides and as far back as the boardwalk or dune. To perform this component of the job the guard will leave their stand and walk or jog



Crew Chief Harrison Fisher stopped this little girl walking down the beach alone because she matched a look out message for a missing 4 year old girl in a purple bathing suit. The parents were immediately notified, to their relief, that she was located 6 blocks south of where the parents lost her and after a few minutes there was a happy reunion. This is just one happy ending of the 2000 lost and found individuals that we reunite each season.

through the crowd. During this “ordinance check” they are looking for ordinance violations such as alcohol, dogs, glass containers, deep holes, improperly placed umbrellas and ball playing too close to others as well as other unsafe activities or conditions. With all that your SRT has to do, please help them out by obeying all laws and ordinances.

Guards often act as babysitters for children they find and for the parents who have misplaced a child. The Ocean City Beach Patrol has a 100 percent return rate for finding and reuniting lost individuals. The guards are trained to remind frantic parents and children who are separated of this fact, and to keep everyone as calm as possible until they are reunited. Once a child is lost or missing they or the parents should go immediately to a guard stand. The guard will obtain a description of the child and send it up and down the beach in semaphore (flag language). All the guards in the area will then be on the look out, and other city departments will be notified by radio. The search is not over until the child is back in the parent’s arms. This situation occurs over 2,000 times during an average season with lost and found individuals ranging from under one year to over 90 with everyone returned. So that children feel safe going to a lifeguard if they are lost, we suggest that parents take their children over to the lifeguard each day and introduce them.

The top two questions that people often ask lifeguards at least a dozen times every day require guards to be both maps and timepieces. Vacationers who are enjoying the luxury of not wearing a watch while on vacation as they stroll along the beach often ask, “What time is it?” and or “What street is this?” Guards are also a good source of knowledge about local restaurants and amusements. Because they live here, the public wants to know what their lifeguard’s favorite places to eat, play and shop are. SRTs receive a briefing during our weekly staff meeting and are prepared with a listing of local events and activities that they are encouraged to share with the public.

Lifeguards are storytellers. Every guard has at least one funny and informative story to share about the ocean. The stories they tell amuse the public while keeping them informed about the ocean environment. With questions like, “When is high-tide?”, “What makes waves?”, “What kind of shell is this?”, “Are you sure those things jumping out of the water aren’t sharks?” , “ Is it going to rain?” , “What kind of bait should I use to surf-fish?”, and finally “ When do you let the dolphins out?” , your guard is also expected to be an oceanographer, marine biologist, weatherman, fisherman and aviary expert just to mention a few.

Now that you know how friendly, knowledgeable and hard working your lifeguard is, you probably want to go and ask them a lot of questions. If you approach a guard stand and ask a guard any question, do not be put off by the fact that they stand up and do not look you in the eye while they answer. All of the lifeguards are happy to answer any questions you may have, but they cannot and will not take their eyes off of the swimmers or patrons at their beach, and I know you do not expect or want anything less.



Captain’s Note: Even though our guards are friendly, knowledgeable and hard working, you should know that every member of the beach patrol is fully tested and certified before they ever have the privilege of guarding you or your loved ones. In fact the bottom line that determines

if I offer them a job is a positive response to the question “Would I trust them to guard someone in my family?” However, even with the most highly qualified and expertly trained lifeguards on the stands, we still need your help. If you are not a highly skilled swimmer with ocean experience, remain close to shore. It takes even the fastest runner and swimmer some time to get to you and the further out you are in trouble, the more time it takes for us to help you. Never rely on an artificial flotation device in place of actual swimming ability. These devices just give swimmers a false sense of security, because in the surf that flotation could be lost and suddenly make the user an actively drowning victim. The ocean and beach are wonderful places to enjoy a summer day, just remember that the ocean is not the same as a neighborhood pool. Our first priority is to keep all beach patrons safe, but we cannot control the ocean. When hazards exist where people are swimming, it is our job to guide them out of harm’s way or when necessary to swim out and assist them back to safety. Our job is made easier when we have their patience, understanding and assistance. One of the most frustrating situations for an SRT is when we are notified of potentially dangerous storms predicted to impact Ocean City or we hear thunder and attempt to clear the beach. Please help us out and understand that your SRT is only looking out for your safety and quickly do what they are asking. Remember, if you hear a whistle take the time to stop what you are doing and look toward the SRT (lifeguard) who is attempting to get someone’s attention. It may be you and if you need help, you should wave your arms over your head indicating to the SRT that you need their assistance. To help us keep you safe always check in with the SRT on the stand and never go in the ocean if the beach patrol is not on duty.