

# OFF-SEASON ACTIVITIES

Rip Current Conference, University of Delaware  
Submitted by Lt. Ward Kovacs

By the time Rob Brander was finishing work on his Master's degree, he thought he knew the surf and the ocean environment pretty well. After all, he had spent years preparing papers on beach dynamics and had done careful research for presentations on topics such as rip currents. As he stood on the beach talking with an Australian lifeguard about rips one day, the guard commented about a prominent rip current that was right near where the two were standing. "Where?" Rob asked. "Right there in front of us" the guard responded. At that moment, Rob realized the difference between being able to describe rip currents and the conditions that cause them from what he had read in books, and being able to actually spot one in the ocean. He also became very aware of the reason that rips are so dangerous for most beach visitors; they can't see them.

While Rob finished his doctoral work on coastal geomorphology, he became more and more interested in beach safety, and particularly, rip current awareness. Now a senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales, he has become known among lifeguards as "Dr. Rip" because of his efforts to make people aware of the dangerous currents that pull many people to their deaths each year. After struggling to find ways to get his message out, he has taken a year of sabbatical in order to travel to other countries to see what other agencies and organizations are doing to promote beach safety and rip current awareness. That is what brought him to the University of Delaware's Verdan Center in Lewes on October 15 where Delaware Sea Grant hosted a "Rip Current and Surf Zone Safety Workshop".

Lifeguard agencies from Assateague State and National Park to northern New Jersey (the other Ocean City Beach Patrol was there) were in attendance, as were representatives from Delaware (who sponsored the event) and Maryland Sea Grant, the National Weather Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. Dr. Brander gave a power point presentation highlighting some of the more dangerous areas along Australia's coast. He used several of the same phrases used by beach patrols in our area to describe types of rip currents, including "flash rips" and "fixed rips". Rip currents that form around permanent structures, rock outcroppings or other land features he labeled "topographic rips". Large rips generated by storms were called "mega rips". One of the more interesting things he mentioned is the nicknames lifeguards and locals have given to some of the strong, permanent rips in their areas. One notorious rip is situated on a beach that is right at the end of a long, arduous hiking trail that is a favorite among tourists. The unsuspecting travelers reach the beach hot, dirty and sweaty, drop their hiking gear and much of their clothing, and plunge into a rip known as "The Backpackers' Express" which quickly whisks them out to sea. Dr. Brander has gained a reputation for throwing purple dye into rip currents in order to track water movement. In fact, he showed so many pictures of purple rips at one presentation, calling them "danger zones", that someone actually asked him why he doesn't just tell people to stay out of purple areas while swimming.

Following the rip current presentation, the National

Weather Service representatives spoke about ongoing projects that are aimed toward developing accurate rip current forecasts. They mentioned the Ocean City Beach Patrol several times, recognizing the important roles we are playing in their research, and also the research by the Johns Hopkins team that is working with the camera system atop the Stowaway Grand Hotel. (Captain's Note: All officers of the OCBP were invited to attend this seminar, however, date and time made it impossible for most to be included).



After breaking for lunch, the group reconvened to view the educational program developed and distributed by Dr. Brander. The program is titled; "Science of the Surf", and is aimed at school-aged children. One of the problems that he mentioned is that it is a struggle to gain access to schools in Australia. At this point, public education efforts became the central topic of discussion. It was interesting that Rob started his education efforts focusing on teaching people how to spot rips, only later realizing that it is more effective to try to convince people that it is better to simply avoid swimming in un-guarded waters. Most of the experienced lifeguards in the room shared a few knowing glances around the room as they nodded in agreement, having reached the same conclusion on this side of the globe as well.

As the formal presentations gave way to the general discussion portion of the seminar, Captain Arbin shared some of the things we do to get the word out about beach safety in our area. I think that most of those in attendance were surprised by all of the things that we do, from weekly safety presentations by crews to situational EDUs. Kristin Joson had put together packets of information with samples of the safety pamphlets, program pamphlets and activity books that we produce and she distributed them to other guests. I spoke briefly about Beach Safety Presentations, both on the beach and in other venues, and those that we hold on a regular or annual schedule. Dr. Brander held up one Australian lifeguard as having talked about beach safety with over 1,000 children over the past few years. He seemed surprised that I had spoken to that many in the past several weeks with three area middle schools, a civic group and a Brownie troop. Most of those in attendance were impressed with our "Keep your feet in the sand..." campaign and all of the avenues that we were pursuing in getting our message out. He also liked and wrote down our mnemonic device for kids to remember about rip currents; **RIP** Relax, **I** need help! Swim **P**arallel.

Overall, it was a good experience to hear from others in our field about both the successes they have had and the challenges that they have faced. In the end it was clear (especially to those of us who have a few years on us) that much progress has been made in our efforts to understand the dangers that the beach environment poses, and in our efforts to bring that information to the public. But, we also agreed that there remains much work to be done in both areas. It is exciting to know that the Ocean City Beach Patrol is a leader on both fronts, and will continue to be at the forefront of beach safety and public education in the years to come.

Captain's Note: Although we have been involved in rip current research and prediction/forecasting for close to 20 years, our level of involvement has increased significantly in this past year. Beginning with a face to face meeting and beach

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## Fall Surfing

Submitted by: Sgt. Rick Cawthern

“You should have been here.” So far this fall has been good and the sandbars are set up nice all over Ocean City. This time of year, the crowds are gone but the waves are pumping. We have had waves at least once a week since we pulled the stands off the beach. Water is still warm but the air temps are cooler. Most people are wearing a 3/2 or like myself wearing a jacket and board shorts. Usually during the fall after a storm or two goes by, we can surf anywhere when there is a swell. The sandbars are set up for surfing uptown and downtown. This time of year, you could surf anywhere the past storms really did a nice job on the sandbars.

C.C. Foy, Sgt. Cowder and I have been surfing after school at Assateague Island which is only a couple of miles from school. Being teachers and working close to Assateague Island is a perfect trade off from leaving Beach Patrol. Mostly because if there are waves we couldn't surf until 6:15pm but now since school started we could be in the water at 3:30pm.

Here are some good websites for checking for swells coming to the Ocean City area.

<http://www.swellinfo.com/surf-forecast/ocean-city-maryland.html>

<http://malibus.com/surfreport.php>

<http://magicseaweed.com/Ocean-City-MD-Surf-Report/395/>

<http://www.atlanticbreezes.com/surfing/>

<http://www.surfassateague.com/>

[http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/station\\_page.php?station=44009](http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/station_page.php?station=44009)

Aloha-Sgt. Cawthern

Pictured below is s secret spot in north Ocean City



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tour with two forecasters from NOAA/NWS in May, followed by a several day on-site visit by a representative with Maryland Sea Grant and several meetings with the lead researcher from Johns Hopkins, we have moved further in the direction of contributing to the science of shoreline dynamics. With our mission of education and prevention this is a natural step to ensuring the safety of visitors not only to Ocean City but to potential victims of rip current encounters world wide.

## Is Rescue Craft Duty in Your Future?

Submitted by Kristin Joson

After spending a summer with the OCBP, many SRTs become interested in advancing to other certifications. One of the steps towards your OCBPSRA advanced certification is obtaining your safe boating certificate. Many people do not realize that in the State of Maryland, you are required to have completed a safe boater's course prior to operating a motor vessel. Further, having this training on file with Beach Patrol is a requirement for Jet-drive School. SRTs already have a jam-packed summer with all the extra-curricular OCBP activities so fitting a safe boating course in can be very difficult. This past summer the local boaters courses offered at our Recreation and Parks facility were canceled due to lack of enrollment and the closest course offered at that time was Frontier Town. A few of our employees were very disappointed that the course was canceled and they would have to wait another summer to participate in our Jet-drive school and Rescue Craft Duty. So, to avoid all that hectic scheduling and studying in the summer, why not get it out of the way this winter?

You have two options to complete this requirement:

1. Find a course near you: <http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/nrp/boatingclass.html>
2. Take the course online: <http://www.boat-ed.com/Maryland/index.html> This course costs \$24.50 and is a 3.5 hour course

Complete the course, and bring your card with you at check in. Get it done, so you too can have Rescue Craft duty this summer!

For out of state residents, a boating safety education certificate issued by another state is valid in Maryland as long as it meets the criteria of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. Be cautious of taking other online boating classes, as most do not meet NASBLA criteria.

**Captain's Notes:** Normally the Beach Patrol does not accept certifications from outside agencies. However, because the Beach Patrol does not offer or sponsor safe boating courses, all you are required to do is to get your safe boating certificate to count towards your OCBPSRA advanced certification. You must provide a copy of the boating certificate that will be placed in your personnel file. Safe boaters course is a requirement to attend jet-drive school or to receive OCBPSRA instructor certification (even if you do not choose to be jet drive certified). An additional requirement to attend jet-drive school is to be in your second year or greater as a Surf Rescue Technician and have completed basic certification. Watch your weekly bulletin this summer for a listing of safe boaters courses in and around the Ocean City area.





# Information

## Statistics Update

Submitted by Sgt. Ed Fisher

For the first time, Beach Patrol statistics went online in 2009. Crew Chiefs and Assistant Crew Chiefs were able to enter data for their crews online. My initial sense was that this added to the accuracy of our data collection. Many of the C.C.'s and A.C.C.'s were entering data daily at their respective beach houses, which was probably more effective than the paper method.

If you would like to take a close look at our statistics for 2009 I would like to refer everyone to our bulletins where Secretary Malone does an outstanding job of reporting each week's statistics, as well as the year to date statistics. Go to: [http://oceanacitymd.gov/Recreation\\_and\\_Parks/Beach\\_Patrol/bulletins.html](http://oceanacitymd.gov/Recreation_and_Parks/Beach_Patrol/bulletins.html)

If you would like to access your crew's statistics you can do that through Google Documents. But considering the numbers, we had a busy summer with over 3000 surf rescues and almost 300 ambulance calls. Warm water temperatures for most of the summer and a moderate tropical season resulted in a pretty busy summer for us.

I would also like to thank all personnel involved with the collection of our statistics as it is very important to our mission and operations, and helps validate what we do every day.

**Captain's Note:** Google Docs is just one example where a WEB 2.0 tool is helping to make the Beach Patrol not only more efficient but also leads to increased accuracy in the information we receive. Web 2.0 applications are being used to gather information from employees about availability, to allow new recruits to register for a test (when they arrive at the testing site their release has been pre-printed (legibly), to report statistical information, to follow Beach Patrol updates (Twitter) as well as many of you are staying connected through Facebook, just to mention a few uses. This is just one more reason why you need to maintain an accurate e-mail address and let the Beach Patrol know if you change it.

## Rip Current Science

Submitted by Sgt. Ed Fisher

Intuitively, lifeguards probably know as much or more about rip currents than the few scientists who study them, but knowing the science is useful as well. Even if it is to help with our mission and educate beach patrons, we can always learn more. Most of our beach patrons know the basics about rip currents i.e. swim parallel to shore, look for foamy surface water and many of the other items printed on our signs. This article may give you a few more tidbits that will help educate people.

I think all of us understand the mechanics of rip currents. Waves break on sand bars and these waves result in more water over the sand bar. This water then moves into the trough area and rushes back through the channel causing a rip.

Considering this more closely, it is this excess water over the sand bar that causes an increase in water pressure over the sand bar. The increase in water pressure on the sand bar causes a pressure gradient that causes the feeder current to form. This feeder current then converges with the longshore current and the resultant current rushes through the channel causing the rip current. This pressure gradient is similar to what occurs in the atmosphere when there are high winds from storms or hurricanes. It is the pressure gradient between a low-pressure system (a storm or weather system) and some high pressure (probably nice weather) somewhere else that causes air to rush from high pressure to low pressure. In the case of a rip current it really isn't much different. The high pressure from excess water on the sand bar causes the water to try to go somewhere else. When that water is forced in-shore because of the pressure gradient and mixes with a moderate longshore current and then finds a channel to go through, the result is a rip current. The meteorological equivalent might be a strong gust of wind.

We can continue to try to understand and learn more about rip currents because there is still a great deal to learn. Scientists have only recently begun to study rips and there are many variables that affect the mechanics of a rip thus making them complex. OCBP has been involved for a long time with helping the National Weather Service develop models and predict rip currents, but I hope that the research continues and our understanding continues to progress.

Note: See article by Lt. Kovacs on a regional Rip Current symposium on page 5 of this newsletter

## Fall Equipment

Submitted by: Sgt. Colby Kauffman

We had a great shut down this fall. For those of you that have helped me in the past, you know the lengthy process it is to get everything ready for next year. After all the clothes are separated and turned into laundry (some sweats could run themselves there), we inventory EVERYTHING...even down to the last band aid! Once the laundry is finished and put away, that too is gone through for holes and to determine whether it can be used for the following year. Once I have all my numbers, I actually start getting quotes on things for the following summer. As of now we already have received 60 new waterproof equipment bags and a p.o. was approved for 48 new pairs of orange raingear.

One of the thoughts for the upcoming year will be to issue everyone equipment that will be issued to the same person year after year. That way, we figure if you know its yours for the length of your stay, then everyone will work harder to take care of it!

As for myself, I started dispatching for the OC police department once Beach Patrol was finished. I can certainly say it is a whole new experience....thankfully I remember my 10-codes.

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I wish you all a safe and healthy winter. Colby Unit 15

**Captains Note:** The Beach Patrol budget is mostly for employee salaries and overall operation expenses. Uniforms and issued equipment account for close to \$50,000.00 annually and does not support the total replacement of these items each season. Therefore, we replace uniforms and equipment on a schedule so that we can budget our expenses and maintain a professional looking workforce. That is why we need your help in maintaining the security and care of all issued Beach Patrol property so that it will have a full serviceable life and that we can continue to outfit you as a professional and provide the most up to date equipment (as stated in our mission). Thank you all for being such great stewards of what the Town has provided..... Let's strive to do even better.

## New Website

Submitted by: Kristin Joson

The Town of Ocean City has completed the process of redesigning two websites that have been around for several years. One of the websites that was redesigned is the OC tourism site formally [www.ococean.com](http://www.ococean.com). The purpose of this site is to advertise Ocean City as a tourist destination and to list events and accommodations for potential vacationers. The new design has a more appealing look and is more interactive. It allows people to easily locate and access all information pertaining to a stay in Ocean City whether for vacation or business. This new website allows visitors to the site to book accommodations online and stay in a single location on the web for vacation planning. The new tourism website coincided with the Rodney the Lifeguard ad campaign. The character of Rodney the lifeguard was used for many purposes, some of which involved personal appearances. However, although it was not the intent to have Rodney represent a real Beach Patrol lifeguard, I cannot tell you how many people have stopped and asked me if Rodney really is a real lifeguard. This new tourism website cost the town \$178,000.00, and all of the radio and television advertising directs people to the new website. Ocean City officials recently voted to renew the contract with MGH and spend up to \$3.9 million.

The second major redesign affected the official Town of OC government website of which the Beach Patrol is a part. This new site houses all town departments including our Recreation and Parks Department. Anyone going on the old domain name will be forwarded to the new site, which will be [www.oceancitymd.gov](http://www.oceancitymd.gov). The idea was for the new design to provide one location for people to find information on anything that involves the Town of Ocean City government operations. One of the goals of this redesign was to create a common look among agencies. To help keep the Beach Patrol presence on the web, I have been in close contact with Bill Funkhouser, the web manager for the Ocean City website. Bill has worked tirelessly to get all of the town websites under one domain. With our old website consisting of well over a thousand webpages, the largest in the town, it is understandable that we are still in the process of rebuilding the Beach Patrol website. I

am continuing to work with Captain Arbin and Bill Funkhouser to get all of our employee resources with forms, bulletins and current newsletters back on the web. One of the most extensive and highly visited areas of our old website dealt with employment and testing. (98% of individuals who register to take a P.E.P.S.E. indicate that they learned about the Ocean City Beach Patrol by visiting our website. This is an area that needs to be rebuilt on the new website. It is my hope to continue to work on the new website to address public education so we can continue to be recognized world wide as a comprehensive site for water safety.

**Captains Note:** Although the new Beach Patrol site does not have all of the information that was previously available at our old location the new site has a uniform look which was the intent of the City manager. We are hoping that the URL address that we have been advertising ([WWW.OCOCEAN.COM/OCBP](http://WWW.OCOCEAN.COM/OCBP)) will remain an active link so that the thousands of items that have been distributed with the old address will not take people to a dead end. After all we have the address painted on the sides of all stands, printed on the sign on the back of the stand, on our 20,000 pencils and in all the many thousands of print publications.



## Do You Want OCBP License Plates?

If you do, you must complete the following:

- Obtain an application by requesting one
- Complete the application form with vehicle information and owner information
- Sign the application and send a check for \$50.00 back to Headquarters
- The Captain must sign off on approval and mail to the MVA.

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south end we received the type of support that we never knew was possible and Mike is still a great friend of the Patrol. Still assigned to patrol is Al Custer who is probably the best known Police Officer to those who work in the south. You can be sure that if you call for Police assistance and Officer Custer shows up that you will be backed up to the fullest extent that the law allows. The last individual I want to identify for their particular support is Detective Bret Case who has come to the aid of the Patrol on several occasions with outcomes always to our benefit. Finally, Chief DiPno has supported the SRTs since she was a patrol officer working plain clothes in the inlet on weekends. Although, there are many other officers and detectives who have come to our assistance over the years I felt it was important to identify these few who were especially instrumental in the forging of our great partnership.