



A Lifeguard's Beach Safety Tips

by Sgt. Ed Fisher
Special to the Dispatch

The writer is a 17-year veteran of the Beach patrol. In the off-season, he is an elementary school teacher in Montgomery 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 Sure Rescue Technicians guard the beach seven days a week from 10 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.



Last Safety Tip of the Season

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I have really enjoyed being able to spread the word about beach safety every week in The Dispatch. Being the last article of the 2008 season, I wanted to recap some important beach safety tips.

There is no question that simply swimming near a lifeguard is one of the most important actions one can take to ensure beach safety. It seems easy enough, but late in the fall season when our beach coverage is about half of peak season, I keep seeing people that have not gotten the memo. As I tour up and down the beach on my ATV, it amazes me the number of people that go out to the beach and swim dead center between two lifeguards. Our guards are constantly trying to corral people to get them to swim near their stand. I even approached a family of swimmers and whistled them out of the water to tell them they were dead center between two lifeguards and that it would be better if they swam closer to the lifeguard stand. To my surprise the father said, "Oh I didn't know there were still lifeguards on duty." It just shocked me that a father would take his whole family swimming at a beach that he thought was unguarded.

Another important tip that is even more obvious than swimming near a lifeguard is learning to swim. Learning to swim is one of the best things people can do to protect themselves from drowning. And studies show that people learn best to swim during childhood. So it is a parent's responsibility to make sure their children learn to swim. If someone does not know how to swim they should not be in the ocean. Period. One of our guards had a rescue the other day where a rip current pulled a gentleman into deeper water. The man immediately started to actively drown and panic. The alert guard saw the situation unfold and responded immediately. Once someone begins to panic and actively drown, they generally have 10-60 seconds until the situation becomes grave. Our guard got there just in time and once he had the guy on the rescue buoy he told him that he should just swim parallel to shore when caught in a rip current. The man's response was, "I don't know how to swim." With so many currents and unknowns in the ocean people should not be in the ocean if they do not know how to swim.

The last tip I would like to leave you with pertains to rip currents. If you find yourself caught in a rip, don't panic or fight the current. Swim out of the current by swimming parallel to shore and then in to shore. If you are unable to swim out of the current just float and tread water and call or wave for assistant. If you are on a guarded beach, help will be on its way.

Thanks for reading and have a great winter season. For more information on the Ocean City Beach Patrol and Beach safety tips you can log on to our website www.ococean.com/ocbp.



Photo by Kristin Josen/OCBP

When Sgt. Ed Fisher is not teaching in his Montgomery County classroom or writing safety articles for The Dispatch, he spends his time on the beaches supervising surf rescue technicians between 20th and 48th street. In this picture he is giving personal beach safety advice to a family.