



## A Lifeguard's Beach Safety Tips

by Sgt. Ed Fisher

Special to the Dispatch

*The writer is a 22-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 Surf Rescue Technicians guard the beach seven days a week from 10 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.*



### **Beach Patrol - 3 part Mission: Education, Prevention, Intervention**

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When some people think of the Ocean City Beach Patrol they might think of tanned lifeguards rescuing drowning people. The beach patrol surf rescue technicians (SRTs/lifeguard) do make rescues, but there is much more to what we do to ensure that all beach patrons are safe. Our mission statement has three goals: education, prevention and intervention (making rescues).

In the last 10 years the education portion of our mission has become a much bigger focus and this directly supports the prevention aspect of our mission. The beach patrol has instituted and incorporated numerous things aimed at educating the public to potential dangers at the beach.

The beach patrol has made it a point to generate and distribute literature and information to the public regarding rip currents, shallow water diving, dangerous shorebreak, digging holes in the sand, and many other hazards. This literature comes in many forms. On the back of every lifeguard stand there is a sign that shows information and pictures about rip currents. Our website [www.ococean.com/ocbp](http://www.ococean.com/ocbp) has safety information and pictures of rip currents. Our guards also hand out pamphlets that have information about ocean safety. If you are interested in any of this information please talk to a lifeguard. They have informational brochures ready to hand out.

The Ocean City Beach Patrol has also worked with other organizations such as the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, Sea Grant and Johns Hopkins University. The Ocean City Beach Patrol has been active in supplying NOAA with data that assists the agency in forecasting rip currents.

Another program the beach patrol started about 10 years ago was the beach safety seminar. Every Sunday morning, in at least 17 different locations along the entire Ocean City shoreline, beach patrons can listen to a beach safety seminar given by members of the Ocean City Beach Patrol. Please call our headquarters at 410-289-7556 for times and locations of these seminars. If you have a group that you would like to participate in a personalized Beach Safety Seminar you can contact our office. The seminar has become an integral part of educating the public. Every Sunday thousands of beach patrons come and see the seminars and get the latest information about ocean safety, the beach patrol and Ocean City itself.

Our lifeguards also frequently do what we call an EDU (semaphore abbreviation for education). An EDU is when a lifeguard recognizes a potential hazard or dangerous circumstance (rip current, heavy surf, etc.) and gets a group of beach patrons together to warn and inform them about the hazard. The idea is that if the public is well informed they will make better decisions, which will result in a safer beach environment for everyone. Each SRT is trained in public speaking and presenting EDUs during the required 65-hour Surf Rescue Training Academy.

As the beach patrol has increased its efforts to educate the public we have seen the results pay off. We have noticed a well-informed public that understands rip currents and other dangers in the ocean.



**Captains Note:** The three-part mission is one of the most unique qualities of your beach patrol when compared to other lifeguard agencies around the world. Not only does your beach patrol make a priority of educating our local community, but as a worldwide leader in beach safety, we are often called upon to give our expertise to other areas of our country as well as other beaches around the world. Each year you will find the Ocean City Beach Patrol featured in national publications as well as nationally televised featured stories.

*Photo take by Kristin Joson/OCBP  
Beach Safety Seminar*

*Why is the lifeguard calling everyone together in the middle of the day? Surf Rescue Technicians (SRT) will gather beach patrons around their stand and perform an EDU to give information about current beach hazards and other safety information. They are also available to answer any questions you may have at any time. In the above picture the lifeguard warns the public of a nearby rip current and explains that if he blows his whistle to look toward him and follow his directions. (He will be directing using his flags.)*

