



## A Lifeguard's Beach Safety Tips

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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.*



### Swim Near a Lifeguard

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Swim near a lifeguard. It is probably the simplest yet one of the most important pieces of information the Ocean City Beach Patrol can give to people and following this advice is the most important step beach patrons can take to ensure safety for themselves, their friends and their family. It all sounds simple, but the number of people that swim without a surf rescue technician (lifeguard) on duty is astounding.

In fact, many of our most serious incidents occur either before we come on duty at 10 a.m., or in the evenings after we are off duty at 5:30 p.m. Unfortunately, many of these incidents have been serious medical emergencies or drowning situations that would have been easily handled by the lifeguard if the victims had followed this one piece of advice. Nationally, statistics reflect large numbers of drowning fatalities on unguarded beaches. For example, in 2010 the United States Lifesaving Association reports that there were 102 drowning deaths on unguarded beaches and 25 on guarded beaches (Ocean City had zero drownings while lifeguards were on duty). All years prior to this reflect very similar numbers where the number of drowning deaths in the United States on unguarded beaches is typically many times more than on guarded beaches.

Throughout Ocean City, lifeguard stands are positioned about one or two blocks apart (further in late August and September). When you come to the beach be sure to find the closest lifeguard and talk to that lifeguard to find out about current conditions and where the best place to swim is. The lifeguard can alert you to any rip currents (third leading cause of weather-related deaths) or other hazards. Remember to introduce your children to the lifeguard so that they know who to go to in an emergency. And always remember, "Keep your feet in the sand until the lifeguard's in the stand."



**Captain's Note:** 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 harms 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. Remember, if you hear a whistle take the time to stop what you are doing and look toward the SRT 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 surf rescue technician on the stand and never go in the ocean if the beach patrol is not on duty.