



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.

OCBP Fall Guarding

Published September 7, 2012

Labor Day marks the traditional end of the summer season and begins what the Ocean City Beach Patrol refers to as “fall guarding.” Fall guarding is different from guarding during the summer months and has many unique challenges. During this period, we are in a reduced coverage mode with fewer lifeguard towers and surf rescue technicians patrolling the beach. This reduction in personnel is an annual occurrence with an earlier start of college classes and the return of our education professionals to school systems throughout the U.S. Additionally, tropical storm activity in the Atlantic is at its peak during this time and contributes to rougher surf. This heavy surf contributes to the frequency and severity of rip currents, which account for 95 percent of surf rescues. With less guards on the beach and stands that are farther apart, a guard may have to run two blocks (200 meters) to rescue a victim where as in the summer they need only run 50 meters. To increase safety and coverage of the beach, the beach patrol relies more heavily on its motorized support vehicles to patrol between stands. This enables them to provide back up if the need should arise.

Although we have less available personnel, the beach patrol remains committed to provide surf rescue technicians along the entire beach for all visitors and residents. So rather than have unguarded areas, the number of available lifeguard towers are equally distributed along the beachfront.

As this redistribution occurs, the location and distance between stands changes. We will continue to provide coverage from 10 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. along all 10 miles of Ocean City beaches until Sunday, September 23rd. This coverage will be done with fewer personnel and lifeguard towers; however, we will supplement this coverage by increasing the number of mobile rescue units patrolling the beach. These mobile units are first aid and AED equipped with one SRT (rider) acting as the primary rescue swimmer while the other SRT (driver) maintains radio communication and backup during an emergency. Both are qualified as surf rescue technicians, medical first responders and are quad (ATV) certified.

Another difference you may notice during the fall season is where surfing is allowed. OCBP Captain Butch Arbin will modify the ordinance that restricts surfing and allow surfing along the entire beach, except where guards are posted. The beach patrol keeps the swimmers in front or near their stand and surfers are encouraged to congregate away from the swimmers. This is a time of the year the surfers enjoy. They can surf while the patrol is on duty and not be confined to designated surfing beaches like they are during the summer.

Surfers must still utilize an ankle leash and remain 50 yards from the nearest swimmer. Having surfers in the vicinity often proves valuable in saving lives. It is helpful to have the extra flotation devices in the water at this time of year when the

coverage is spread over larger spans of beach. It is not unusual for surfers to aid a distressed swimmer and keep them afloat until a surf rescue technician can reach them and take them safely back to shore. Although surfing restrictions have been modified, the beach patrol still reserves the right to prohibit surfing in certain areas or under certain conditions. The use of skim boards and other watercraft (kite surfers, windsurfers, paddle boards, kayaks, etc) is still prohibited.

Even though fall guarding is different than guarding during July, the first priority of the beach patrol continues to be public safety. To aide your SRT, the beach patrol suggests taking extra precautions and make sure to walk the short distance to swim in the vicinity of a lifeguard stand. We strongly encourage all beach patrons to restrict any water related activities to times when beach patrol personnel are on duty, never swim alone, always stay with the limits of their ability and never rely on a flotation device.

For additional information, please call Beach Patrol Headquarters. Guard stand placement may relocate daily as conditions change. The exact location of guard stands is available everyday by calling Beach Patrol Headquarters at 410-289-7556 between the hours of 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.