



## 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.*

### **Fall: The Most Challenging Part of the Lifeguarding Season**

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It is difficult to believe that summer is almost over and the “week” of August, as we call it, has come and is just about gone. All of us are trying to take in all we can of what’s left of the summertime and make it last as long as possible. For the majority of us who are students or educators, our life away from the beach is calling us back or we are already back. OCBP has a large number of SRTs in college and many others on the patrol are educators at various levels in school systems throughout Maryland, the U.S. and even Canada.

It is a lifestyle that allows us to have our summers free to pursue our work with the beach patrol. The downside of this availability is that many colleges and school systems start classes before Labor Day weekend. Consequently, as classes have started again, the beach patrol’s numbers start shrinking.

As the beach patrol strives to maintain the maximum number of guard stands on the beach, vacationers continue to choose Ocean City as a vacation destination. This situation becomes the greatest challenge for the patrol as we try to provide the same level of protection for each visitor as when we are at 100 percent staffing. To complicate matters, this is also the time of year that Ocean City experiences an increase in the volume and size of waves due to tropical activity in the Atlantic. August and September are traditionally our large surf months, producing larger waves, rip currents and shorebreak.

As we move later into September, fewer guards are left to handle bigger rips and waves. This is when the training and skills they have been honing all summer will be put to use keeping all of our beach patrons safe during these busy final weeks of the season.

Through the experience and expertise of Lt. Mike Stone (28 years with the Patrol and a local school counselor) and his scheduling skills, we have been able to obtain our goal of keeping the maximum number of guard stands on the beach for the maximum number of days. Many of our personnel who have not left for other commitments will volunteer to work without a day off to add to our staffing so that we can provide the maximum coverage. All surf rescue technicians will have a more challenging situation with the greater distance between stands and a larger area of responsibility. Many of these personnel will choose to work without a day off until the end of the season so that we can provide additional coverage and the added safety to swimmers of more guards on duty. A large number of SRTs, who have left for other obligations away from the beach,

will return on a part-time basis. They return to help out on both weekdays and weekends, even scheduling classes to allow availability during several days each week.

OCBP is committed to provide SRTs along the entire 10 miles of beach for all visitors and residents, so rather than have unguarded areas, the number of available lifeguard towers is equally distributed along the beach front. As this redistribution occurs the location and distance between stands changes (sometimes on a daily basis). We will continue to provide coverage of all 10 miles of Ocean City beaches until Sunday, September 23rd. Thanks to the support of the mayor and city council we will continue to provide this level of coverage whereas nearby beaches have reduced their coverage throughout the season and will be closing down their entire operation earlier than in past seasons due funding issues. Although Ocean City's coverage will be done with fewer personnel and less lifeguard towers, 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. SRTs will be on duty daily between 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

To make sure we end our season and yours safely, vacationers and locals can help the guards and themselves by making the extra effort to swim close to a lifeguard. We strongly encourage all beach patrons to restrict any beach or water related activities to times when beach patrol personnel are on duty, never swim alone, always stay within the limits of their ability and never rely on a flotation device.

Lt. Mike Stone uses his scheduling expertise at Ocean City Beach Patrol headquarters on Saturday, to reach the goal of maintaining the maximum number of SRTs on the beach for as long as possible. Stone has been with the patrol for 28 years. His primary responsibilities include employee assignments, placement of stands on the beach, scheduling the SRT's, and accounting for employee work hours before they go to payroll. In the off-season Mike is employed with the Worcester County school system as a school counselor.

