



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.

Get to Know Your Local Lifeguard (SRT)

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Commonly referred to as lifeguards, the people responsible for your safety on the beaches of Ocean City, are actually surf rescue technicians (SRT). Surf rescue technician is the certification obtained by the men and women in the red bathing suits who watch over the beach in the white stands, once they have successfully completed all testing, training and probation.

Once a rookie has earned the title of surf rescue technician you will hear them referred to as SRT Miller or SRT Johnson. Although people still refer to our personnel as lifeguards, the term surf rescue technician is far more appropriate due to the job demands, which far exceed a traditional lifeguard. Each SRT has demonstrated competency in the techniques and skills that are required for open water rescue. Their duties include educating the public, warning swimmers of potential dangers, rescuing distressed swimmers, responding to emergency situations, administering first aid, reuniting lost and found individuals, and enforcing city ordinances.

The Ocean City Beach Patrol is on duty everyday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. starting the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend and continuing through the third Sunday after Labor Day.

The beach patrol tests potential SRTs beginning in August each year for the next year's season. If you or someone you know would like to work for OCBP as a surf rescue technician, there will be a pre-employment physical skills test on Saturday, August 13th. This test is for the 2012 summer season. We are looking for physically able, ambitious and responsible men and women who are 16 years of age or older. They must be 17 by the date of employment.

Every candidate must have the ability to run in soft sand, swim in ocean water, enter and exit the ocean through the surf, move an unconscious person of 150 lbs., see for 400 meters, hear and locate a whistle blast from 300 meters, and speak and read the English language. To demonstrate these abilities each candidate must pass a rigorous, physical test consisting of the different phases in succession that include a 300-meter soft sand run in under 65 seconds, 400-meter ocean swim in less than 10 minutes, simulated rescues in the surf with a rescue buoy, victim removal techniques, run-swim-run medley, tower transport (lifeguard stand), holds and releases (escaping from a panicked victim), and lastly an interview with beach patrol Captain Butch Arbin.

Once a candidate completes and passes all phases of the test they are appointed, on a probationary basis, to a surf rescue academy. Prior to entering academy, (and each year after), each employee must pass a drug test. Candidates receive instruction in open water rescues, beach patrol policies and procedures, basic oceanography, use of rescue equipment, first aid, CPR, semaphore communications (a series of signals using flags), radio protocol, and physical training consistent with the demands of the job.

All phases of surf rescue academy must be completed successfully as determined by the Ocean City Beach Patrol Surf Rescue Association to earn SRT rank and assignment to the beach. Surf rescue academy is an eight-day, 65 hour, paid-training program conducted by beach patrol instructors with support from other public safety agencies, followed by three weeks of supervised, on-the-job probation and a surf rescue academy re-qualifying test where candidates must pass the run and the swim again. Because of the uniqueness of the job's demands, the Ocean City Beach Patrol does not accept certification or experience with other agencies. All aspects of becoming an SRT, as well as all certifications such as first aid, CPR and AED are completed during surf rescue academy.

Now that you know what goes into the making of a surf rescue technician, you can feel confident when swimming under their watch. Our SRTs want to help you remain safe and enjoy your time in Ocean City. Don't wait until you need help to meet your "lifeguard." Feel free to introduce yourself and your family and ask about the current beach conditions and your lifeguard will know about the free family activities that are offered in Ocean City. We pride ourselves on being the Town's ambassadors; after all, we are glad you are here!



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 surf rescue technicians 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 in the ocean you are, 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 harm's 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 surf rescue technician 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 surf rescue technician that you need their assistance. To help us keep you safe, always check in with the surf rescue technician on duty and remember our slogan, “Keep your feet in the sand, until the lifeguard’s in the stand!” This simple tip could save a life...
YOURS!