



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.

Reduced Coverage

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The Ocean City Beach Patrol has been in a reduced coverage scheme since the third week in August (August 20th). This reduction in personnel is an annual occurrence and is complicated by the early start of college classes and the return of our education professionals to school systems throughout the United States. This also includes our local Worcester County Schools, which had students begin a week prior to Labor Day.

Reduced coverage is a reduction in available staff and extends until the Sunday of Sunfest weekend (the 3rd Sunday following Labor Day), September 23rd. During this reduced coverage, staffing levels will be far less than the OCBP's mid-season deployment. OCBP had over 75% of their staff report to other responsibilities prior to Labor Day with the majority returning as students, and the remainder taking full time career positions or returning to their classrooms as educators. Many of these educators are required to return two weeks prior to Labor Day each year to attend professional meetings and prepare for the arrival of students. Several school systems brought teachers back 3 weeks before Labor Day which has been a trend for the past couple of years for both colleges and public school systems. This change has dramatically impacted the availability of the majority of our 200 employees during the last weeks of summer. Historically we have needed to begin reducing coverage beginning with the 3rd week in August as our staffing levels decreased to approximately 60% of our mid-season deployment.

However, this year has been more challenging than the past few, and the number of stands we are able to deploy on a daily basis has been lower than in recent years. This is a direct result of several of the SRT's who had planned on working full time until the final day of the season getting full-time employment, several with the local school system. This will allow them many additional years of guarding but reduces their overall availability for each season. These local educators along with other additional returning Surf Rescue Technicians will allow us to increase the total number of stands (and decrease the distance between stands) on weekends. In addition, we are increasing the number of Mobil Rescue Units patrolling the beach.

Further impacting our situation at the end of the season is tropical storm activity in the Atlantic as well as Hurricanes. They do their fair share of stirring up some rough surf. This heavier surf has contributed to the frequency and severity of rip currents that formed along the beaches of Ocean City the last few weeks and still continue to pose a threat to swimmers. As a result, these have been some of the most powerful, largest rips that we have seen this season. The Beach Patrol believes that these conditions warrant beach patrons to take extra precautions and walk the short distance to swim in the vicinity of a Surf Rescue Technician (Lifeguard) on a stand.

Because of the dedication and commitment of the Ocean City Beach Patrol staff, we will be able to continue providing coverage for all 10 miles of Ocean City beaches until Sunday, September 23rd (Sunfest weekend). Although this coverage will be done with fewer personnel and less lifeguard towers, we will supplement this coverage by increasing the number of Mobil 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 continue to be on duty daily between 10:00 am and 5:30 pm., although the distance between stands will be greatly increased. To protect yourself and aide your SRT, the beach patrol strongly suggests that you swim in the close vicinity of a lifeguard stand. Because the first priority of the Ocean City Beach Patrol continues to be public safety, 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.

In contrast to closing out the 2012 season, this is also the time when the OCBP starts testing for new lifeguards for 2013 and begin focusing on our staffing needs for next season. As we plan for next season we will review statistics and data and will make decisions on the number and placement of lifeguard stands. To begin reaching our recruiting goals we held a test on August 11th and September 1st and offered appointments to next season's Surf Rescue Academies to 30 highly qualified candidates. If we need any additional staff for next season we will hold additional pre-employment physical skills evaluations. They may take place during the winter at colleges in the mid-Atlantic region or in Ocean City in late May and June. Those individuals who qualify will receive an appointment to a paid Surf Rescue Academy in May or June 2013 where all training and certifications will be provided. As you can see the ending of one season blends into the beginning of the next with a lot of the behind the scenes planning taking place throughout the winter. For additional information about the testing or training of Beach Patrol hopefuls click on the JOBS button on our website www.ococean.com/ocbp. Or for daily locations of SRTs, call Beach Patrol Headquarters at 410 289 7556. Always remember, "Keep your feet in the sand until the lifeguard's in the stand!" and for your safety, walk the distance to the nearest Surf Rescue Technician (Lifeguard) on a stand and only swim when Lifeguards are on Duty.



Captains Note: This fall guarding season began with an unusually busy day the Tuesday after Labor day. Tropical Storm activity in the Atlantic brought increased surf and larger waves which resulted in more frequent, larger and stronger rip currents. These rip currents caused the remaining SRTs to make close to 40 rescues in a very short time period and nearly turned deadly on several occasions. As a result all swimmers were removed from the ocean and individually warned by the SRT and encouraged to move directly in front of the guard stands, where the SRT could better manage their safety. If you cannot easily see the SRT then they cannot easily see you or know if you are having difficulty. And PLEASE never swim when the Beach Patrol is not on duty... Otherwise we may be reading about you in this same newspaper.