



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.

Surf's Up in Ocean City

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Due to large beach crowds from Memorial Day to Labor Day, surfing is only permitted in designated areas during the beach patrol's operating hours of 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Seven days a week there are two rotating surfing beaches. And, on weekdays there is also a third surfing beach set up in the inlet area. No activity other than surfing is allowed in the surf beach area.

The two rotating surf beaches move two blocks south each day. Based on the current rotation, a specific street block would not have the surfing beach on the same date for over 20 years. So if your family stays on 10th Street the second week in July every year, and the surfing beach were to be on 10th street this year during that week, it would not happen again for the next 20 years.

The third surfing beach operates Monday through Friday and is always in the same location starting at the south rock jetty at the end of Ocean City and extending 200 yards north. This area was picked because it is usually not crowded on weekdays. Furthermore, it is not safe to swim close to a rock jetty.

On certain days when inclement weather affects Ocean City, the Beach Patrol Captain may allow surfing. This decision is made daily with the input of supervisors on the beach. If there are low numbers of people on the beach, and the weather is poor and not predicted to improve, the surfing ordinance may be modified. There are also other factors taken into consideration when making this decision. On days of inclement weather, you can ask any SRT on the beach if the surfing ordinance has been modified, or call beach patrol headquarters at 410-289-7556. Local surf shops may also know when the surfing ordinance has been modified. Even during these conditions swimmers always have the right of way and surfers must be at least 50 yards away from any swimmers and wear a leash at all times (Ocean City ordinance).

Surf beach areas are marked by smaller yellow stands on the particular block designated, one at the north end of the block and the other at the south end. Members of the beach patrol called surf beach facilitators (SBFs) are assigned to work at the surfing beaches. The SBF makes sure the operation of the surf beach runs smoothly. They make sure surfers stay within the designated area, while also educating the public and making sure they do not swim in the surf area. The SBF begins their workday at 9 a.m., an hour earlier than the rest of the patrol. During that time they are talking to beach patrons who are not planning to surf, making sure they understand the surfing beach operation.

The basic concept behind the surf beach is safety. Keeping surfers separate from swimmers and waders is a proactive way to keep everyone safe and happy with the way they choose to enjoy the ocean. Many beach communities throughout the country employ similar rules. To get the daily surfing beach rotation, visit any local surf shop or the beach patrol website at www.ococean.com/ocbp.

For more information about surf beaches, contact Lt. Ward Kovacs at beach patrol headquarters, 410-289-7556. He is the beach patrol officer in charge of surfing beaches. Here at the beach patrol our number one priority is your safety, so please keep our slogan in mind and, "Keep your feet in the sand, until the lifeguard's in the stand!" This simple tip could save a life.... YOURS!



Captain's Note: Occasionally during each summer, special event permits will be issued by the Mayor and City Council to hold a surfing event at a section of beach other than the rotating surfing area. These events are usually surfing contests and are attended by hundreds of spectators and competitors and are enjoyable to watch. During these events swimming and wading is prohibited for your safety and the beach patrol will be on the beach making sure the event goes smoothly. Although this may cause you to walk half a block to enter the water, remember that surfing is important to the whole beach experience and although it may tie up a few blocks, swimmers still have over 150 blocks to enjoy.

Photo by: Kristin Joson

In this picture a Surf Beach Facilitator (in a green bathing suit so as not to be confused with the red bathing suit of the SRT) its talking with a family explaining that for today only they cannot participate in water related activities on this particular beach and that they only need to walk a short distance beyond the checkered flag. You can identify a surf beach by the orange and white-checkered flags and the yellow surf beach stands although a lifeguard will still be assigned to that beach (as shown in the photograph).

