

Surfing Beaches in Ocean City

Due to large beach crowds from Memorial Day through Sunfest (end of September), 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. 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 which prohibits Body Boards and Paddle Boards. However, we still staff the area with Surf Rescue Technicians (Lifeguards) so that in the event that no one is surfing we can open that area of beach to normal swimming activities until someone wants to surf. Last summer these beaches were open to swimming more often than not due to the lack of surfable waves; yet we staffed them every day starting on Memorial Day Saturday, in the event that anyone from our surfing community wanted to give them a try.

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 (It will be on every beach a couple of times every season but during a different time of the season) . This really isn't too much to ask to share this wonderful resource with the surfing community.

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 150 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 and often has a wave break that surfers like.

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. When surfing is modified the surfers can surf on any beach in Ocean City as long as they stay 50 yards from all non-surfers (swimmers and waders) and wear a leash. 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. Also, in 2013, the beach patrol began a surfing notification service which allows you to receive alerts when the surfing rules have been modified allowing surfing on all beaches. If you are interested in receiving this service, please visit our website to sign up. 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 non-surfers and wear a leash at all times (Ocean City ordinance). On these special days, we still staff our surfing beaches to make sure that surfers have an area that is not being shared with swimmers.

Surf beach areas are marked by smaller yellow stands and flags 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 and wear green or yellow uniforms so that they are not confused with the Surf Rescue Technicians (Lifeguards). 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 or wade in the surf area. The SBF begins their work day at 9:30 a.m., a half hour earlier than the rest of the patrol. During that time they talk to beach patrons who are not planning to surf, making sure they understand how the surfing beach operates. To further facilitate the smooth operation of the surfing beaches the SBF will go to the next day's surfing beach (2 blocks south) to inform the beach patrons that the following day their beach will be the surfing beach. If there are no surfers and the beach is "OPEN" to swimming, the SBF's will assist the surrounding SRT's with ordinance enforcement, until one or more surfers arrive and the Beach becomes an exclusive surfing area again.

The basic concept and bottom line behind the rotating surf beach and Town ordinance 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. We also establish a buffer zone, where no one is allowed, between the swimming area and the Surf beach on both sides. Rules and ordinances similar to this are in effect in many jurisdictions throughout the country. I have heard many young surfers say something to the effect that the surfing beach rules are dumb and only exist in Ocean City. However, several other beach resort areas like Pacific Beach in San Diego, California, run its surf beach very similarly to ours, as does Del Mar, California during its busy season.

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.

In recent years the Beach Patrol and City Council have attempted to update the city code to make allowances for newer water sports and give more access to the waves for the newer style body boards and Stand Up Paddle boards (SUP). The city council voted to accept the beach patrol's recommendations (who sought input from local surf shops) to change the city ordinance that previously prohibited any bodyboards over 42 inches. With the change in the ordinance, soft top body boards up to 54 inches, without skegs (fins) and with a leash may be used on any Ocean City beach with the exception of the surfing beaches. By enactment of section 106-94 (11) the City Council allows the use of Stand Up Paddleboards (SUP's) beginning on the Monday following Labor Day, on any day that surfing is modified. There are specific requirements included in the ordinance and can be accessed on the Towns website.

Have fun but ride safely and look out for others.

To get the daily surfing beach rotation, visit any local surf shop or the beach patrol website at www.ococean.com/ocbp and don't forget to sign up for the surfing notification service. For more information about surf beaches or to apply for one of the Surfing Beach Facilitator positions, contact Lt. Ward Kovacs at beach patrol headquarters, 410-289-7556 or check out our website. He is the director 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!