



BEACH and SURF SAFETY

You may forget your cares during a leisurely day at the beach but even a beautiful beach has dangers—especially for the unaware. Whether “catching some rays” or plunging in the surf, the information in this brochure is designed to help you enjoy the fun and avoid the dangers.

NPS LIFEGUARD PROTECTED BEACH AREA

NPS Lifeguards supervise designated beach areas in both Maryland and Virginia districts of Assateague. For a safe recreational experience, locate near an on-duty lifeguard within the boundaries of the red over yellow flag. Hours of operation are from 10 am – 5pm. Take extra precaution when swimming outside the lifeguard area or during off duty hours; wear a life jacket. If you want to learn more about lifeguarding, attend one of our surf rescue demonstrations on:

- Virginia District – Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10:00 am
- Maryland District – Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday 10:30am



LIFEGUARD BEACH FLAG SAFETY SYSTEM

Yellow with black circle flag is permanently placed 50 yards beyond the lifeguard area and represent a safety zone. No fishing, no rigid craft, no open beach fires and no dogs permitted between these flags.



Red flag indicates a high hazard exists such as strong surf and seaward currents.



Double red flag indicates a severe hazard, and a closure is in effect. Visitors will be kept out of the water until the hazard subsides.



Red over yellow flag represents the area supervised by lifeguards. For safety, recreate within the boundaries of these flags.



Purple flag indicates potentially dangerous marine organisms such as stinging jellyfish are present.



Yellow flag indicates a moderate warning for surf conditions. Caution should be exercised.



U.S. Coastguard Approved Life Jackets Permitted**



When you hear the whistle: Lifeguards will not signal swimmers simply because they are in deep water. The lifeguards will signal swimmers toward shore because they are approaching a hazardous area, or they are moving too far out for adequate supervision.

First Aid and rescue: The Lifeguard operation is equipped with rescue equipment and first aid supplies. The lifeguards are trained in ocean rescue and are certified EMS providers. If you need assistance, contact a lifeguard or call 911.

Visitors with physical disabilities: Physically challenged individuals who require special consideration in aquatic recreation may want to use the protected beach. Beach wheelchairs are available in both Maryland and Virginia district beaches. Contact a Lifeguard or Ranger for direction and assistance.



HAZARDS

Lightning: In 1986, four people were killed by a lightning strike as they huddled under a beach umbrella on a nearby beach. If you see lightning or hear thunder, seek immediate shelter inside your vehicle or an enclosed building. Do not huddle under an umbrella or underneath a lifeguard tower. During a storm, the entire protected beach will be closed to the public.

Shark: During the rare occasion of a shark sighting, the beach may be closed to entry. A closure may also occur if a school of bluefish are in a “feeding frenzy”. The risk of a shark attack is low however, there are ways to reduce the risk even further. For instance, don’t swim at dawn, dusk and night, swim with a buddy, don’t go in the water if you are bleeding and stay clear of schooling bluefish and other schooling fish.



Unsecure Umbrella: Umbrellas blown across the beach have caused many injuries. When strong gusty winds blow, umbrella tops should be set facing into the wind. Make sure a good size hole is dug and pack in sand firmly around it.



HAZARDS

Sun: Each year several visitors get sun burn from over exposure to UV radiation. Watch your children, use clothing, umbrellas and sunscreen. Lifeguards may have extra sunscreen if you need it. Umbrellas may be purchased at the snack shack in the MD district and in the town of Chincoteague in the VA district.

Beach Holes & Tunnels: Digging holes can be fun but realize that each year there are fatalities on US Beaches from hole and tunnel collapses. Do not dig holes past your waist, supervise your children and do not create tunnels.

Jellyfish: Most jellyfish you encounter at Assateague will not sting but some do, particularly those with color. Be safe - do not touch any jellyfish. If you get stung, see a lifeguard. You can rinse the area with sea water or vinegar. A badly stung person should receive medical treatment. Check to see if lifeguards are flying a purple flag.



Flotation Devices: Body Boards, Noodles, and other Flotation Aids can be considered a hazard in the ocean. Many drownings and rescue incidents are associated with the use of inappropriate flotation devices. Many people associate “safety” with flotation aids and feel safe going out much further than they should. Currents or wind can move an unsuspecting person into deep water or far offshore. This is an invitation for disaster; people may be separated from the device by waves, slipping off or choose to prematurely let go of the device to try and make better progress to shore.

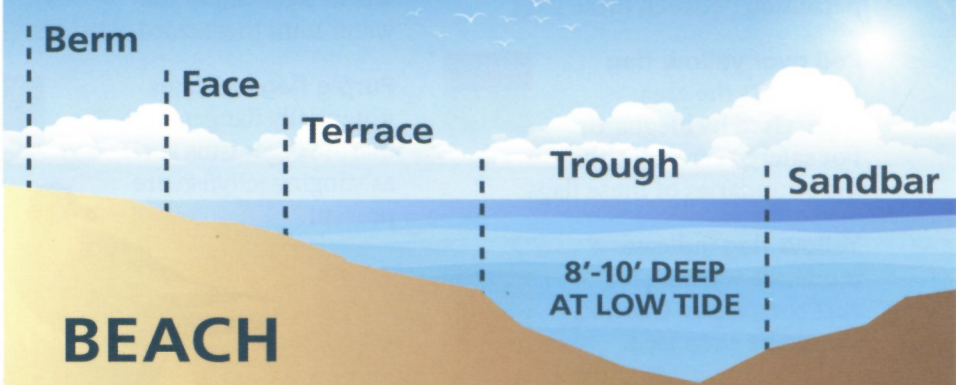
Remember, flotation aids that move with waves travel with considerable speeds with the compound force of the wave behind you. The weight of a person on a speeding object may cause an injury if there is a collision with another person or the hard packed beach surface. Hard objects, such as surfboards, kayaks and skim boards can be especially hazardous. For these reasons, Coast Guard approved lifejackets are the only devices allowed on the lifeguard protected beach.

Strong Surf: Onshore winds cause waves. Because ocean winds vary, waves change from day to day. All waves deserve respect. Body surfing and swim fins are allowed in the lifeguard area – be careful! Do not try to ride waves that are too forceful for your level of skill. Sand abrasions, broken limbs and dislocated shoulders are not uncommon. Spinal injuries with permanent paralysis may result when people are thrown to the bottom by breaking waves.

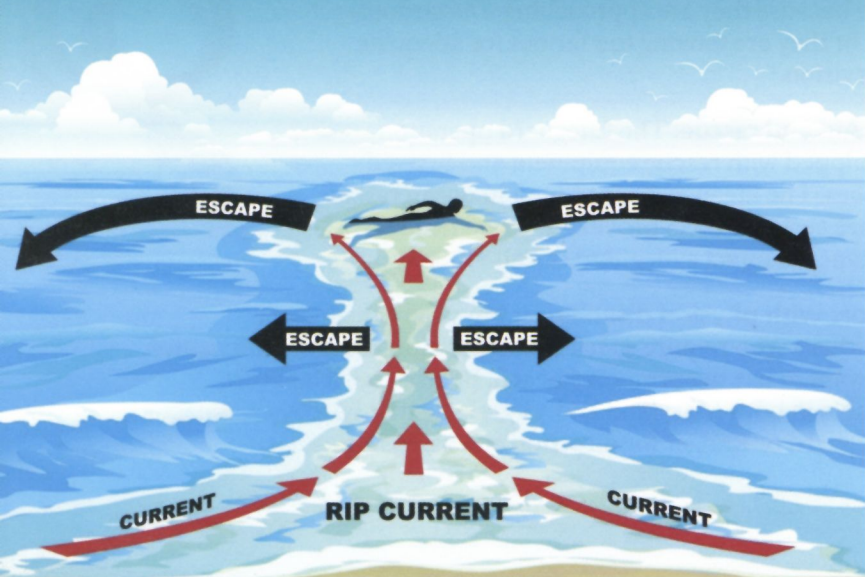
To escape a waves great force, you can duck under or retreat from breaking waves. If you are riding a wave in some fashion, and are thrown off, try and prevent direct head and neck contact with the ocean floor. Do not run and dive into the surf if you do not know the depth and topography.

SURF ZONE TOPOGRAPHY

Be aware that the surf zone topography can be variable. A beach face may be narrow or steep. The trough and terrace may contain ridges, holes and drop offs. Often, when the depth is only waist deep on the sandbar, the water will be over your head on the way out. In other areas, it may be shallow the whole way out to the sandbar. For your protection, people will be kept off the sandbar until it is reasonably safe for young people and poor swimmers alike, to access the sandbar.



There are two types of surf zone currents to be aware of; one that moves along the shoreline called a longshore current and one that move in a seaward direction called a seaward current.



Longshore Currents: will form when waves approach the shoreline at an angle. This current is present on most days and may be strong. When lifeguards are on duty, they will post the speed and direction on beach information signs.

Seaward Currents: will form because of wave action and wave energy. Seaward currents include: back rush, fixed rip currents, permanent rip currents, traveling rip currents and flash rip currents. Do not panic if you get in one and do not wear yourself out trying to swim against it. Normally they are not wide. Swim parallel with the shore a short distance and then swim to the shore out of the current. Save your strength for your own rescue. If you cannot get to shore, float on your back and control your breathing. Call for help and raise one arm up for attention. When you see someone in distress, find a lifeguard or ranger or call 911. Do not attempt a rescue yourself unless you are trained in ocean rescue.

SAFETY ADVICE

- ✓ Swim near an on-duty lifeguard.
- ✓ Learn to swim.
- ✓ Swim with a buddy.
- ✓ Wear a coastguard approved life jacket.
- ✓ Check the depth before you dive.



INTERESTED IN BECOMING AN NPS SURF LIFEGUARD?

You will receive 100 hours of paid training including surf rescue, ATV training, EMR and CPR training. Candidates must pass a timed swim and run test.

For more information, contact:
Chief Lifeguard 410-629-6094

