Rip Current Safety Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

A rip current, sometimes referred to as a rip tide or undertow, is a powerful and fast-moving channel of water that flows away from the shore and into the ocean. It is typically caused by the water that is pushed towards the shore by breaking waves, gathering in a concentrated path as it returns to the sea.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

RIP CURRENT OR UNDERTOW DANGERS

Strong water flow: Rip currents are powerful and can move swiftly, reaching speeds faster than an Olympic swimmer. The force of the current can make it difficult for swimmers to escape its pull.

Dragging away from the shore: The primary hazard of a rip current is that it carries swimmers away from the shore and out into the open water. This can be disorienting and lead to panic, exhaustion, or being unable to return to safety.

Exhaustion and fatigue: Attempting to swim against a rip current can quickly lead to exhaustion. The strong flow can tire even the strongest swimmers, making it difficult to stay afloat or reach the shore.

Lack of flotation: If swimmers are not wearing proper flotation devices, the buoyancy of their bodies alone may not be sufficient to keep them afloat in the turbulent waters of a rip current.

Hazardous underwater terrain: Rip currents can carry swimmers into areas with hazardous underwater terrain, such as rocks, coral reefs, or submerged objects. These obstacles can cause injuries or make it harder to escape the current.

Panic and disorientation: The sudden and unexpected nature of rip

currents can induce panic and disorientation in swimmers. This can impair decision-making abilities and increase the risk of accidents or injuries.

Secondary hazards: In an attempt to escape a rip current, swimmers may encounter other hazards, such as crashing waves, strong surf, or other rip currents nearby. These additional dangers can complicate rescue efforts and increase the risk of injuries.

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF NOT PRACTISING RIP CURRENT SAFETY

Drowning: Rip currents are one of the leading causes of drowning at beaches worldwide. If swimmers are caught in a rip current and don’t know how to respond, they may panic, exhaust themselves, and become unable to stay afloat.

Fatality: In extreme cases, failing to navigate a rip current properly can result in fatalities. The powerful force of the current can carry individuals away from shore, making rescue attempts more challenging.

Injury and trauma: Even if a person survives a rip current incident, they may sustain injuries from being tossed against rocks, coral, or other underwater obstacles.

Psychological impact: Rip current incidents can cause psychological distress and trauma for both victims and witnesses. Survivors may experience anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or a fear of water, making it challenging to enjoy future beach-related activities.

Emergency response and resources: Responding to rip-current incidents requires the involvement of lifeguards, beach patrol, or other rescue personnel. These incidents divert resources and put rescuers at risk while attempting to save lives.

Economic impact: Rip current-related accidents can have economic consequences for coastal communities. Beach closures, negative publicity, and reduced tourism can impact local businesses and the overall economy.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BASIC RIP CURRENT UNDERTOW SAFETY PROTOCOL

- **Choose safe swimming areas:** Swim at beaches with lifeguards on duty and within designated swimming zones. Lifeguards are trained to identify and respond to rip currents promptly.
- **Observe ocean conditions:** Before entering the water, assess the surf conditions, including wave size, water movement, and any warnings or advisories issued by authorities. Avoid swimming in rough or hazardous conditions.
- **Stay alert and informed:** Pay attention to signs, flags, or verbal warnings provided by lifeguards or beach authorities regarding rip currents or other water hazards. Stay informed about local water conditions and any changes that may occur.
- **Learn how to spot rip currents:** Look for visual clues such as churning, choppy, or discolored water, as well as areas with fewer breaking waves. These indicators may signal the presence of a rip current.
- **Stay calm if caught in a rip current:** If you find yourself caught in a rip current, it is crucial to remain calm. Do not panic or exhaust yourself by swimming against the current. Instead, swim parallel to the shore until you're out of its pull, and then swim back to the beach.
- **Use flotation devices:** If you're not a strong swimmer, consider using a flotation device such as a life jacket or buoyant object when entering the water. It can provide additional support and keep you afloat if needed.
- **Educate yourself and others:** Learn about rip current safety and share this knowledge with friends, family, and fellow beachgoers. Teach children about rip currents and the appropriate actions to take if they encounter one.

HOW TO TREAT WORKERS INVOLVED IN A RIP CURRENT INCIDENT

Seek professional help: If you observe someone struggling in a rip current, immediately contact the lifeguard on duty or notify beach patrol personnel.

Do not enter the water: If you are not a trained professional or

experienced in water rescues, avoid entering the water to attempt a rescue yourself.

Throw a flotation device: If available, throw a flotation device such as a lifebuoy, life jacket, or any other buoyant object to the person in the water.

Provide verbal instructions: If you are near the person caught in a rip current, calmly communicate instructions to them. Advise them not to panic and to try swimming parallel to the shore to escape the current’s pull. Encourage them to conserve energy and signal for help if they are unable to swim out of the current.

Call for backup: If there are other individuals around, ask them to alert lifeguards, beach patrol, or emergency services for additional support.

Offer reassurance: If you can communicate with the person in distress, provide reassurance and try to keep them calm. Let them know that help is on the way and encourage them to stay afloat and conserve energy.

FINAL WORD

It is important to note that rip currents are different from tidal currents or surf waves. Rip currents do not pull swimmers under the water but rather carry them away from the shore. Understanding and respecting the power of rip currents is crucial for beach safety.