



SEA GRANT AND RIP CURRENT AWARENESS: Regional Highlights

Rip currents are one of the most significant but least talked about hazards along the coast. Each year the United States Lifesaving Association reports tens of thousands of rip current related rescues at beaches across the U.S. and an average 100 deaths.

To put this in perspective, the international shark attack file maintained by the Florida Museum of Natural History contains just over 1,000 records of unprovoked shark attacks in the U.S. since 1580, with just 44 of those being fatal. In spite of these staggering statistics, more people are afraid to enter the water for fear of getting eaten by a shark than for fear of getting caught in a rip current.

Sea Grant programs throughout the U.S. have long focused on educating the public about the dangers of rip currents. The Sea Grant programs of the northeast mid-Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, and Delaware) are involved in several special projects aimed at increasing the public's awareness of rip currents and other surf zone hazards.

Since 2003, the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium has distributed over 2,500 rip current beach signs and 20,000 brochures to coastal communities warning about the dangers of rip currents. This year the Girl Scouts of the Jersey Shore have partnered with the Consortium to add QR tags to many of the signs that direct people to a website with more information. More recently, NJ Sea Grant, Stevens Institute of Technology, and the National Weather Service (NWS) have worked together to create a rip current reporting mobile app that is already being used to enhance communication among lifeguards, improve communication with the NWS, and guide future research.

In New York, New York Sea Grant recently partnered with Stephen Leatherman, "Dr. Beach" to distribute over 65,000 rip current awareness brochures in the Hamptons. New York Sea Grant has also been an active supporter of research focused on improving understanding of rip currents. Most recently they supported a scholar who developed an integrated monitoring system using video beach cameras, wave observations and numeric models to better understand the conditions that cause rips on the south shore of Long Island. The findings emphasized just how complicated rip currents can be to predict.

Delaware Sea Grant has been one of the leaders in the regional Sea Grant-NWS collaboration and coordination on rip current research, education and awareness. Two years ago, Delaware Sea Grant sponsored a workshop attended by lifeguards and NWS personnel throughout Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey, which featured Dr. Rob Brander, an internationally renowned rip current expert based in Australia. Since 2010, Delaware Sea Grant has also worked with partners on a project examining contributory factors that lead to the occurrence of surf zone injuries. Over each of the past two summers, Beebe Medical Center Emergency Department has treated more than 400 surf zone-related injuries, ranging from minor abrasions to significant blunt organ trauma and significant orthopedic trauma. A primary goal of the study is to increase understanding of weather, ocean, and beach conditions that are most likely to result in ocean-user injuries.

For additional information visit the Delaware, New Jersey and New York web sites or contact Dr. Jon Miller at jmiller@stevens.edu



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