This preparedness guide explains rip currents, rip current hazards and suggests lifesaving actions that YOU can take to avoid getting caught in a dangerous rip current.

**Rip Currents Can Be Deadly!**
The United States Lifesaving Association estimates that the annual number of deaths due to rip currents on our nation’s beaches exceed 100. Rip currents account for over 80% of rescues performed by beach lifeguards.

**What is a Rip Current?**
A rip current is a narrow stream of water moving swiftly away from the shore. They typically extend from the shoreline, through the surf zone and past the line of breaking waves. Rip currents are often perpendicular to the shoreline.

Rip currents form when waves break near the shoreline. This action piles up water between the breaking waves and the beach. One of the ways this built up water returns to the ocean is through a rip current.

A rip current can quickly pull a swimmer offshore. Rip currents can even sweep the strongest swimmers away from the beach. Drowning deaths occur when people pulled offshore are unable to keep themselves afloat and swim to shore. This may be due to any combination of fear, panic, exhaustion, or lack of swimming skills.

**Rip Current Facts**
- Rip Currents can be as narrow as 10 feet and as wide as 200 feet.
- A rip current can extend hundreds of feet beyond the surf zone.
- Rip current speeds are typically 1-2 feet per second, but some can exceed 8 feet per second (Faster than an Olympic swimmer can swim!).
- Rip currents are present on many beaches every day of the year and occur most often during low tide.
- The strength and speed of a rip current increase as wave height and wave period increases.
- Rip currents most typically form at low spots or breaks in sandbars, and also near structures such as jetties and piers.
- Rip currents do not pull people under water, they pull people away from the shore.

**Rip Current Formations**
- Channel of churning, choppy water
- Area with a drastic change in water color
- Line of foam, seaweed, or debris moving away from the coast
- Break in the incoming wave pattern
- One, all, or none of these clues may be visible.

**How to Identify Rip Currents**
Rip currents are very difficult to identify, but if you look for any of these clues, you may be able to spot one and avoid its dangers:

1. **Don’t Panic!** Try to remain calm to preserve energy and think clearly.
2. **Don’t try to fight the current!** Instead of trying to swim back to shore against the current, swim parallel to the shoreline across the current.
3. **When completely out of the rip current:** swim and angle away from the current and towards shore.
4. **Try to float or calmly tread water.** Rip current strength eventually decreases offshore. When it does, swim toward shore.
5. **Draw attention to yourself!** Face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.

What To Do If Someone Else Is Caught In A Rip Current
1. **DO NOT** try to save the person by yourself! Many people have died trying to save others from a rip current.
2. **Get Help!** Contact the closest lifeguard.
3. **Call 9-1-1 if no lifeguard is available.**
4. **Throw something that floats to the victim such as a life-jacket, ball, or cooler.**
5. **Yell instructions on how to escape.**

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How Can You Avoid A Rip Current?

Before you go to the beach:
- Learn how to swim.
- Check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach conditions.

Once you are at the beach:
- Look for flags or other warning signs posted on the beach that may indicate higher than usual hazard.
- Talk to a lifeguard about the rip current risk before swimming and follow any instructions they give you.
- Never swim alone! Use the buddy System. Only go in the water if you are with at least one other person who knows how to swim.
- Swim with caution.

A daily rip current outlook is included in the Surf Zone Forecast, which is issued by many National Weather Service offices.

You can check your local forecast at:
http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/forecasts.shtml

The Rip Current Outlook shows three stages of rip current hazards:

Low Risk means that wind and/or wave conditions are not expected to support the development of rip currents. However, rip currents can sometimes occur, especially in the vicinity of jetties and piers. Know how to swim and heed the advice of the beach patrol/lifeguards.

Moderate Risk means wind and/or wave conditions support stronger or more frequent rip currents. Only experienced surf swimmers should enter the water.

High Risk means wind and/or wave conditions support dangerous rip currents. Rip Currents are life-threatening to anyone entering the surf.

If in doubt, don’t go out!

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, rip currents are the second most fatal weather hazard nationwide and claims more lives than floods, tornadoes, lightning, and hurricanes.