



MIAMI-SOUTH FLORIDA

National Weather Service Forecast Office

<http://www.weather.gov/miami>



2016 Severe Weather Awareness Week

Tuesday, February 23rd is Marine Hazards and Rip Current Awareness Day

Year after year, rip currents consistently rank at the top of the list of deadliest weather-related hazards in south Florida. Since 1979, rip currents, sometimes erroneously referred to as rip tides or undertows, have claimed more lives in south Florida than any other weather-related hazard combined!

Four people died from rip currents in 2015, two during the March spring break period and two in early May. An additional 17 people required medical attention after being rescued by lifeguards or Good Samaritans.

Rip current casualties can occur year-round in the usually-warm South Florida surf, but happen most frequently during the spring break period in March and April, as well as during the summer months and on major holiday weekends. Tragic incidents such as these occur almost every year despite rip currents having good public awareness and plenty of media coverage. Why do people still succumb to rip currents?

WHAT'S A RIP CURRENT?

A rip current is a strong channel of water flowing out past the surf zone that can pull even the strongest swimmer into deeper water beyond the sand bar. Most deaths occur when people caught in the rip current try to swim toward shore directly against the current, become totally exhausted and drown. Sometimes, would-be rescuers also drown. By understanding how a rip current works, people can escape this fate.

Rip currents occur naturally and can affect virtually all of the surf beaches along the south Florida coast. These currents can pose a big threat to unsuspecting beachgoers. Rip currents can be referred to as the “fair weather killer” because they often occur when the weather appears to be generally nice. All that’s required is a moderate to fresh onshore wind.

Rip currents are normally only about 10 to 30 yards wide and the best escape is usually to wade or swim sideways across the current and parallel to shore. Another method of escape is to float with the current out a short distance beyond the breakers, then swim shoreward at an angle away from the current.

RIP CURRENTS
Break the Grip of the Rip!

ESCAPE ESCAPE
ESCAPE ESCAPE
RIP CURRENT

Rip currents are powerful currents of water moving away from shore. They can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT

- ◆ Don't fight the current
- ◆ Swim out of the current, then to shore
- ◆ If you can't escape, float or tread water
- ◆ If you need help, call or wave for assistance

SAFETY

- ◆ Know how to swim
- ◆ Never swim alone
- ◆ If in doubt, don't go out

More information about rip currents can be found at the following web sites:
www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov
www.uscg.org

The best way to stay safe and to be informed of the presence of dangerous rip currents is to heed the advice of lifeguards. Make sure you swim at guarded beaches and be aware of the [flag color system](#) used by ocean rescue personnel to alert of rip currents. Sadly, the vast majority of rip current drownings take place at unguarded beaches. If you see a red flag at or near the lifeguard stand, strong and dangerous currents are present and you should not enter the water. Your chances of being rescued from a rip current are significantly higher when swimming within sight of a lifeguard.

BOATING IS FUN, BUT WATCH THE WEATHER!



South Florida's aquamarine waters make it prime boating country. We are surrounded by water on three sides and the third largest fresh water lake in the United States, Lake Okeechobee, sits just north of the Everglades. There is also a vast network of canals, bays and other waterways which cut across the area. These bodies of water are vulnerable to rapid changes in the weather which can occur in south Florida throughout the year. Fast moving thunderstorms are a threat mainly during the summer months but can occur year-round and often catch mariners by surprise. Sudden gusts of wind and rough seas associated with local thunderstorms and large swells from distant storms can be strong enough to overturn boats. A sad reminder of this frequent threat occurred on July 24th when strong thunderstorm winds capsized a boat carrying two teenaged boys off the coast of Jupiter. The boys were never found despite extensive rescue efforts.

It's because of these rapidly-changing conditions that vessel operators should err on the side of safety, be prepared for rapidly-changing weather and/or water conditions EVERY DAY and always wear life jackets onboard. More information on boating safety can be found at the [National Safe Boating Council's web site](#).

Waterspouts are common occurrences over all of South Florida's large bodies of water year-round, although they're more frequent during the warm and humid summer months. Therefore, you must prepare and stay aware of weather threats in order to remain safe while enjoying a day out on the boat. NOAA Weather Radio is an excellent source of continuous weather information, including warnings and advisories for rapidly changing and dangerous weather conditions. Check the [NWS Marine/Safe Boating web site](#) for more details.

The National Weather Service in Miami issues daily Hazardous Weather Outlooks and Surf Forecasts which alert the public of expected hazardous marine weather and rip currents. The rip current threat is also forecast daily on a scale ranging from none, to slight, to moderate, to high. Coastal and special weather statements are also issued when the rip current threat is high. This information can be obtained via NOAA Weather Radio, television or commercial radio, or by visiting the National Weather Service in Miami website at weather.gov/southflorida and clicking on the Local Hazards tab.

For further information on rip currents and rip current safety, please visit the National Weather Service's Rip Current Awareness website at www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov.