



RHUMB LINES

Straight Lines to Navigate By



July 21, 2008

Water Safety

"We're halfway through the Critical Days of Summer, a time when there is the potential for increased mishaps. This is especially true for activities such as swimming, boating, snorkeling, and other enjoyable pastimes that personnel are more likely to enjoy during the summer than at other times of the year. The vast majority of Sailors and their families have done a great job of managing recreational risks, but there's still a lot of warm weather ahead. This is no time for complacency."

– **RADM Arthur J. Johnson, Commander, Naval Safety Center**

Following basic swimming precautions can keep you and your loved ones from harm

- If you can't swim, stay out of the water.
- Swim in areas supervised by a lifeguard. Read and obey all rules and posted signs.
- Children or inexperienced swimmers should take precautions such as wearing a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device.
- Check the depth of any body of water—pool, lake, river, ocean—before you dive into it.

Rip currents can hide where you least expect them

- A rip current is a strong surface flow of water which has been trapped behind a sandbar and is flowing seaward from near the shore. It can occur at any beach with breaking waves, including oceans, seas, and Great Lakes.
- Many swimmers are surprised by rip currents because they are found in unusually calm waters. The water in a rip current may appear darker than the surrounding area.
- Look for the signs of a rip current before entering the water.
- Rip currents drag swimmers away from the beach, leading to drowning deaths when they attempt to fight the current and become exhausted. The strongest rip currents can pull swimmers eight feet per second.
- While not a rip current, the regular undertow from strong, breaking waves can also exhaust and disorient weak swimmers. Stay out of rough surf.

Be prepared when heading out for a day on the boat

- Anyone planning to participate in any boating activity should know how to swim.
- [Use Coast Guard approved life jackets](#) for yourself and every passenger in the boat.
- [Take a Coast Guard boating course](#), which will teach you about navigation rules, emergency procedures, and the effects of wind, water conditions, and weather.
- Know local weather conditions and head back to the boat launch as soon as you see or hear a storm.

Practice risk management skills when relaxing at the pool

- Never leave a child unsupervised around the pool. A child can drown in just a few feet of water.
- Keep toys away from the pool when not in use. Toys can attract young children to the pool.
- Enclose the pool completely with a self-locking, self-closing fence with vertical bars. Openings in the fence should be no more than four inches wide.

Key Messages

- Mixing alcohol with water sports or boating impairs judgment, balance, and coordination which affect your swimming and diving skills and reduces your body's ability to stay warm.
- Learning to swim is the single best thing anyone can do to [stay safe in and around the water](#).
- The buddy system, coupled with common sense, can be a lifesaver.

Facts & Figures

- Rip currents cause an average of 100 deaths in the United States every year, more than all other natural hazards except heat and floods.
- Drowning deaths are second only to personal motor vehicle mishaps in terms of off-duty fatalities in the Navy.

For more information about water safety visit www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/recreation