

Aquatic Safety



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. To receive this publication in an alternate format, contact:

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Discover the many states of California.™

**For information on water safety in
California State Parks, go to:
www.parks.ca.gov/aquaticsafety**

LEARN TO SWIM

Learning to swim is a fundamental life skill that should begin at an early age and continue throughout a person's life. The ability to swim provides an individual with the basic foundation for aquatic safety and self-rescue. If a person's swimming skills are developed, these skills can provide opportunities for sports, recreation, careers, and lifelong health.



Water's force truly inspires awe on our planet.

Water both gives us life and teems with life. It also offers a wealth of recreational opportunities as varied as any water-sports enthusiast could hope for—from boating to fishing, boogie boarding to waterskiing, sailing to surfing, swimming to wading.

With over 300 miles of ocean coastline and 625 miles of reservoir and lake shoreline, California's state parks offer all these water-related adventures and more. But, sometimes it's difficult to remember that something so fun and beautiful is also so powerful, strong,



Always keep an eye on the surf.

BE SAFE AROUND THE WATER

Water has the potential to be dangerous at any time and in any location.

- ◆ Always keep an eye on children! Do not allow kids into the water without an adult.
- ◆ Never turn your back to the ocean—large waves can hit the shore without warning, surging further up the beach than normal waves. The backwash can knock you off your feet and drag both children and adults into deep water.
- ◆ Know what a rip current is and how to escape the “Grip of the Rip!” (See diagram).
- ◆ Never dive headfirst into the water—you may hit hidden rocks or the shallow bottom, resulting in serious injury, paralysis, or death.

and potentially dangerous. Every year people drown in the waters of California. Every year people are injured in state parks due to water-related accidents. But with a healthy respect for water, and a few

safety precautions, you can help prevent an accident and enjoy all the fun and healthy recreation water has to offer.

DIVING IN CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

The opportunities for diving in California are tremendous. Although the thrill of diving is undeniable, it's important that every diver understand and recognize the inherent risks of diving before going into the water.



- ◆ Get your dive certification.
- ◆ Know your limitations—dive only to your ability, training and experience level.
- ◆ Check the conditions before you go (weather, visibility and currents.)
- ◆ Know your entry and exit points.
- ◆ Always dive with a buddy.
- ◆ Plan your dive and dive your plan! Have an emergency plan that you and your buddy have agreed on.

RIP CURRENTS

Rip currents account for 80% of all water rescues performed by lifeguards at surf beaches.

What are rip currents?

- ◆ Rip currents are channelized currents of water flowing away from shore at surf beaches (see graphic on back page).
- ◆ Rip currents typically form between sandbars and near structures, such as jetties or piers.
- ◆ A rip current can be very narrow or more than 50 yards wide.
- ◆ Rip currents are common and can be found on many surf beaches every day.

Why are rip currents dangerous?

- ◆ Rip currents pull people away from shore.
- ◆ The speed of rip currents varies but can quickly increase and become dangerous to anyone entering the surf.
- ◆ Rip currents can sweep the strongest swimmer out to sea; they are the #1 cause of drownings in the ocean.



Photo courtesy of Nick Steers

Aerial view of a rip current



State lifeguards are equipped and trained to save lives.

HELPING SOMEONE IN TROUBLE

You may find yourself in a situation where you're not the person in danger, but someone else is. Do not become a victim trying to help—many people have died trying to save others struggling in the water.

- ◆ Get help from a lifeguard or call 9-1-1.
- ◆ Direct the victim out of the rip by having them swim parallel to shore, then swim away from the rip at an angle toward shore.
- ◆ Throw the victim something that floats.

What if I'm caught in a rip current?

- ◆ Stay calm and don't fight the current.
- ◆ Escape the current by swimming parallel to shore. When free of the current, swim away from the rip at an angle toward shore.
- ◆ If you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself by facing the shore and calling and waving for help.

For more information on rip currents, go to: www.usla.org

SAFE BOATING SAVES LIVES

Tragically, every year boating-related deaths happen in California's state parks. Most such accidents can be prevented by taking a boating safety course and following a few simple safety precautions.

- ◆ Carry life preservers. A vessel must carry at least one properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) for each person on board. State law requires children under age 12 to wear a lifejacket while the vessel is underway unless the child is in an enclosed cabin.



Always wear a life jacket while boating.

RIVER SAFETY

The clear, rushing allure of rivers and streams entices many into the swift-running waters flowing through California. Whether recreating from shore or floating the rapids, visitors must take safety precautions while on our rivers.

- ◆ Know the flow—High flows on the rivers can be dangerous and may fluctuate. Do not overestimate your skill or underestimate the power of the river.

All boaters should wear a lifejacket when on the water.

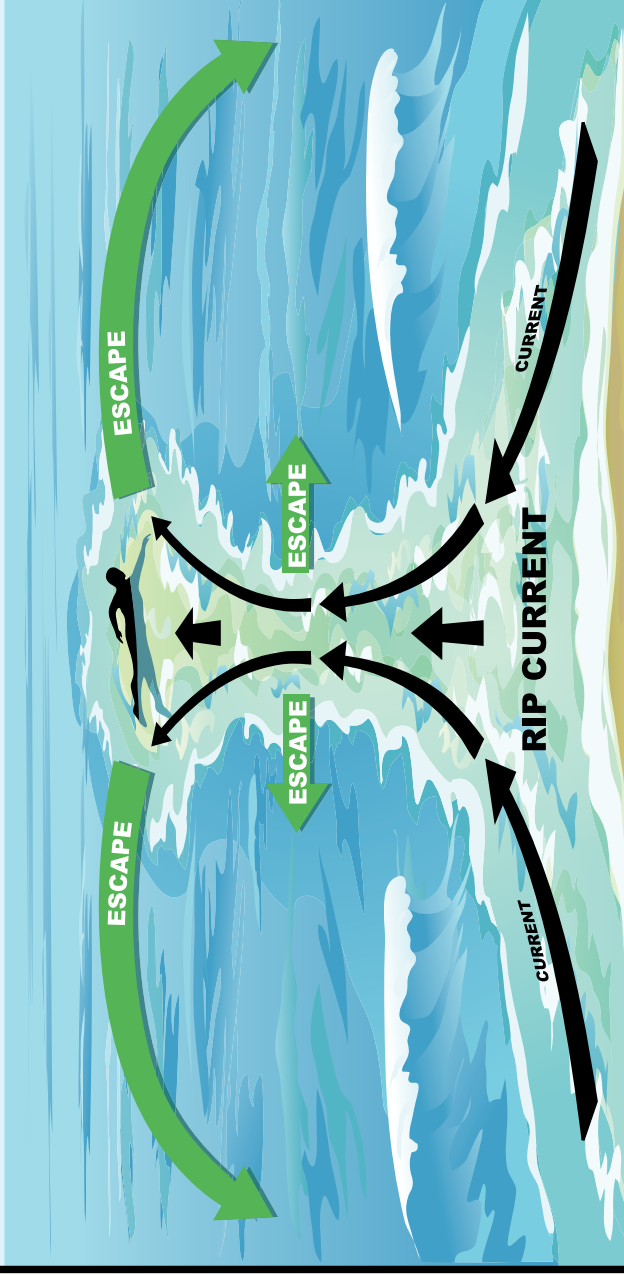
- ◆ Check your safety equipment—Fire extinguisher? Anchor? Signal devices? Radio/cell phone? Lifejackets?
- ◆ Don't drink alcohol and operate a boat. Alcohol and water recreation don't mix. It is dangerous and against the law to operate a boat while intoxicated.
- ◆ Inhaling carbon monoxide can be deadly. State law prohibits the dangerous practice of teak surfing, and exposure to boat exhaust can cause unconsciousness and lead to drowning.

Knowing the river's flow before you go is one way to determine whether the river is suitable for your level of experience.

- ◆ Wear a lifejacket—Always wear a properly fitted PFD at all times when you are in or near the river. Although it may be hot on shore, the shock from cold water in the river can deplete the strength of even the strongest swimmer, and hypothermia can lead to unconsciousness. Wearing a lifejacket will help keep you afloat.

RIP CURRENTS

Break the Grip of the Rip!



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:

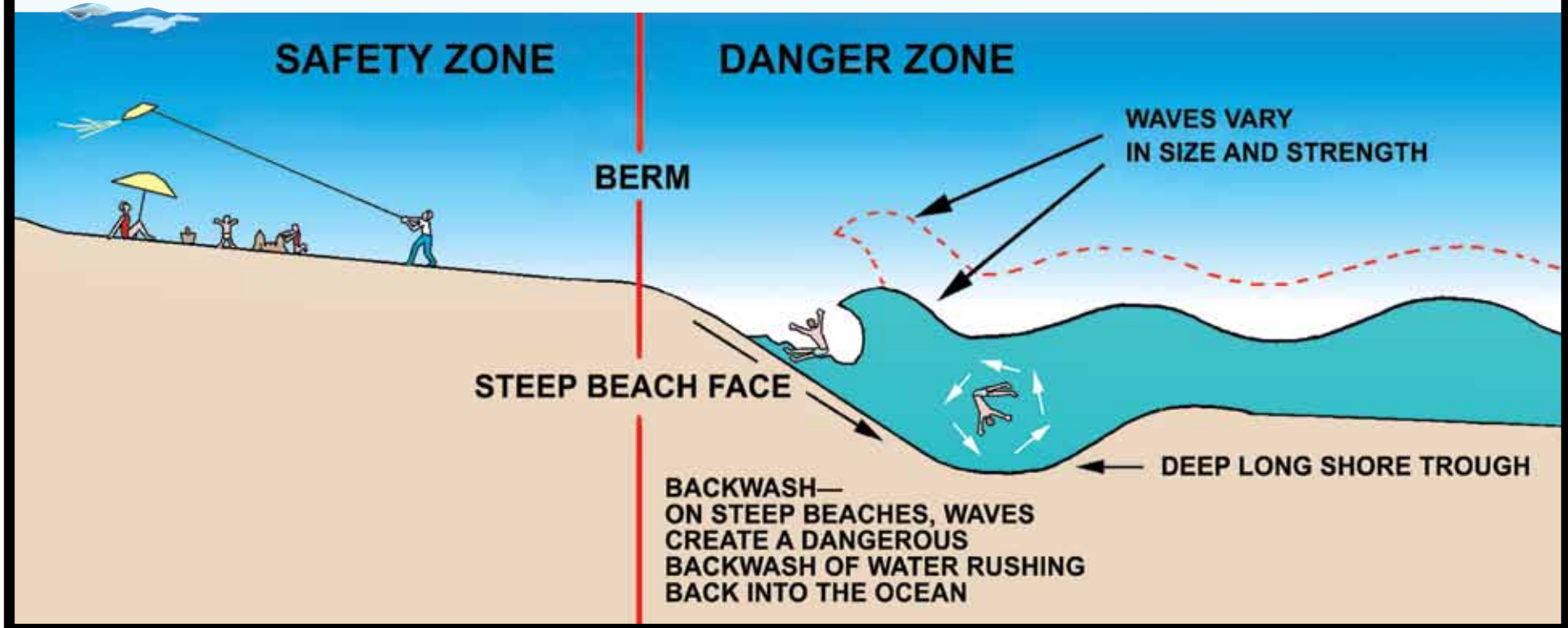
www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov

www.usla.org



For more information about rip currents visit www.usla.org

STEEP BEACHES



AVOID STEEPLY FACED BEACHES

Strong shorebreak can knock you down and powerful backwash can pull you out into deep water!

OCEAN AND BEACH SAFETY

in California State Parks



Being safe at the beach means knowing the ocean and understanding the natural hazards of the surf.

- ◆ Swim at a beach protected by lifeguards.
- ◆ Rip currents are the number one cause of aquatic rescues.
- ◆ Even on calm surf days, powerful rip currents can pull you out.
- ◆ Avoid swimming near jetties, piers, and rocks due to the danger from rip currents or striking an underwater hazard.
- ◆ If you see someone in trouble call 9-1-1 or contact a lifeguard.

Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else! 

Learn to swim before you go—and never swim alone! 

www.parks.ca.gov/aquaticsafety