

## **US Coast Guard emphasizes water safety this summer**

### **Local News**

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SEATTLE, Wash. - The [13th Coast Guard District](#) reminds beachgoers and boaters of the importance of water safety during the summer holidays and all year-round. Swimmers have been taking advantage of the warm weather by taking to the waves from the shores of Washington and Oregon. The Coast Guard has been experiencing a higher volume of beach-related search and rescue cases, with strong, unpredictable rip currents to blame. Last weekend alone, local Coast Guard units received 14 reports of swimmers being pulled out to sea by rip currents. Unfortunately, two of those cases resulted in the victims drowning. While the ocean may be warm enough to swim in, current water temperatures can still cause a loss of body heat and mild hypothermia. Even experienced swimmers can lose motor function and become easily exhausted after just a few minutes of immersion. Of course, boaters have been out enjoying the warm weather as well. One of the most important actions members of the public can take to reduce boating injuries and fatalities is to always wear a life jacket. The Coast Guard estimates that more than 80 percent of boating fatalities could have been prevented if the victims had been wearing life jackets. All states have regulations regarding life jacket use by children.

Tips for swimming safely: Always use the buddy system. It is NEVER advisable to go out in the water alone. Many swimming deaths involve single swimmers. Learn water rescue techniques you can use if someone you are swimming with is in danger. Swim near a lifeguard. [U.S. Lifesaving Association](#) statistics, during a 10-year period, show that the chance of drowning at a beach without lifeguard protection is almost five times greater than drowning at a beach with lifeguards. Swim sober. Alcohol can be a major factor in drowning. Alcohol can reduce body temperature and impair swimming ability. Both alcohol and drugs impair good judgment, which may cause people to take risks they would not otherwise take. If you get caught in a rip current, don't try to fight it by swimming toward shore. Swim parallel to the shoreline until the current relaxes, then swim to safety. Most rip currents are narrow and a short swim parallel to shore will bring a swimmer to safety. Don't float where you can't swim. Non-swimmers and weak swimmers often use flotation devices, such as inflatable rafts, to go offshore. If they fall off, they can quickly drown. No one should use a flotation device unless they are able to swim. Keep an attentive eye on small children playing along the shoreline. Avoid extended hours in the surf. Never underestimate the power of an undertow, even in light surf. Be mindful of your environment. Cold water and hot air temperatures can cause rapid exhaustion. In addition, surf and weather conditions can deteriorate quickly, especially as the day progresses. Avoid unnecessary risks. Walking on jetties is risky because it only takes a momentary loss of footing to invite tragedy. Jumping from jetties, waterside structures or into unfamiliar water is extremely dangerous because unseen underwater hazards may exist. More tips can be found at the United States Lifesaving Association website, [www.usla.org](http://www.usla.org). Some other important reminders: Never operate a vessel while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. To take the pledge to boat sober, visit [www.operationdrywater.org](http://www.operationdrywater.org). Always leave a float plan with a family member or friend on land. A float plan is an invaluable resource for emergency responders attempting to locate a distressed vessel. To download a free, blank float plan, visit [www.floatplancentral.org](http://www.floatplancentral.org). Invest in a marine band radio for on board your vessel. VHF-FM radios are more reliable than cell phones and have the ability to alert

nearby boaters who may be able to assist in an emergency. Additional safety tips can be found at [www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org).