

# S P L A S H

June 2018

## Rip Currents – Stay safe at the Beach

New Brunswick and the Maritimes are home to world class beaches that are favorite destinations during the summer months. While visiting the beach, the best way to ensure a safe, enjoyable experience is to swim and play in a designated swimming area supervised by National Lifeguards. Local guards know the ins and outs of the beach and ensure the swim zone is safe and ready for the public. However, only a handful of our many beaches are supervised and you may find yourself fancying a swim without professionals watching over you. Among the many dangers to identify and avoid, rip currents are one of the deadliest.

Rip currents are strong, localized, narrow channels of water flowing away from shore through the surf zone where the waves are breaking. They pose a serious threat because, to the untrained eye, they appear as a patch of calmer water in the surf zone, and attract bathers looking for less wave action.

The Society spoke with Dr. Chris Houser, a Coastal Geomorphologist, who has been studying rip currents since 2008. He recently delivered a series of presentations across the Maritime Provinces on why rip currents are dangerous, how to identify and avoid them, and what to do if you find yourself caught in one. "Since the public is largely unaware and unable to spot a rip,

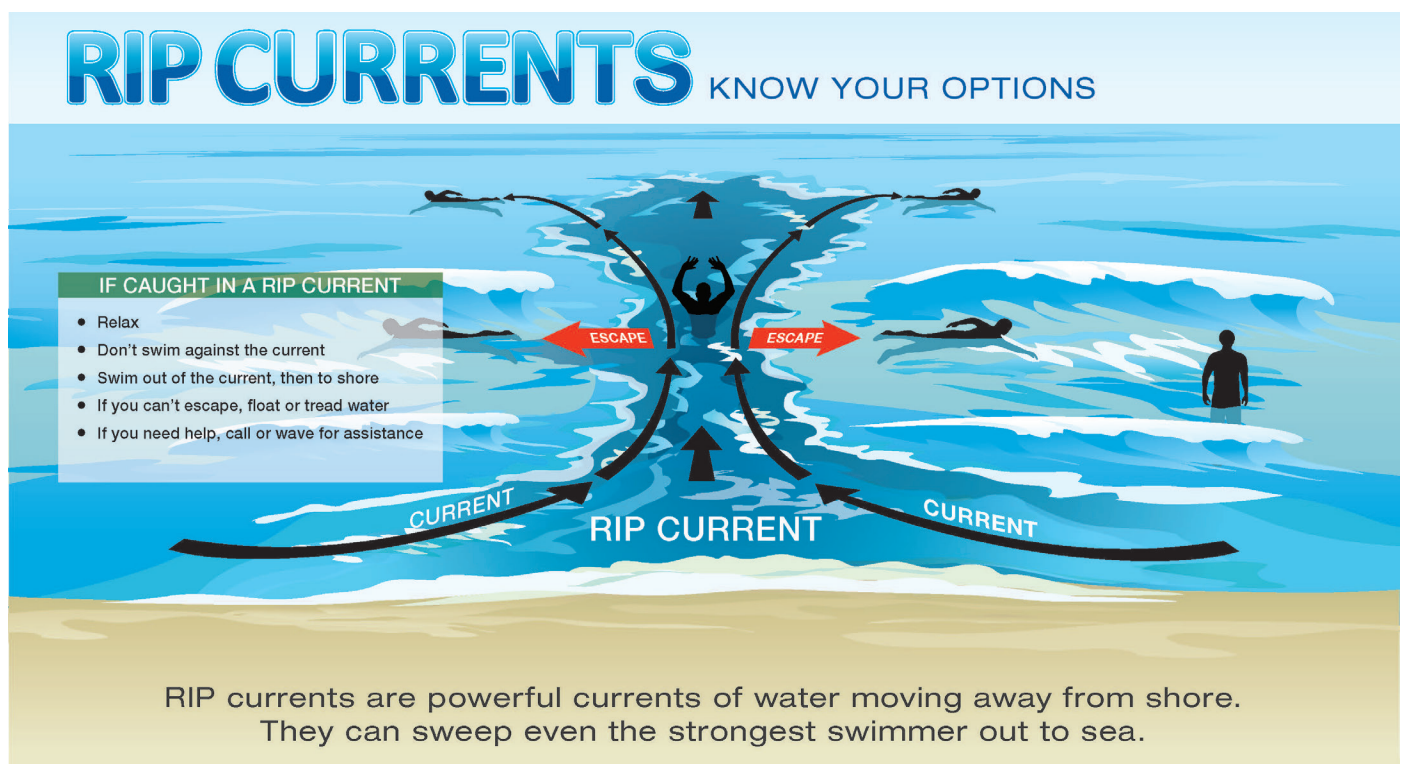
they will get into a dangerous situation," Dr. Houser explained. "Most of the time an individual will be standing in what appears to be safe water, but will quickly be taken offshore by the current as waves pass by and lift them up".

Swimmers caught in a rip instinctively try to swim towards shore. However, rip currents can flow at up to 3 metres per second preventing even strong swimmers from making any progress leading to fatigue and panic.

Dr. Houser says that with sufficient training, it is possible to spot rip currents, but it takes practice. And even with training, there are types of rips that can be difficult to spot. He says a simple way to avoid rip currents is to swim where the waves are breaking and avoid what appears to be calm water.

If you do find yourself caught in a rip, the most important advice is to relax and not to fight the rip. "It's a myth that rip currents will pull you under the water," Dr. Houser says. "The best way out is to swim parallel to shore or to just let the rip push you out until the current weakens and you can let the waves push you back to shore."

Dr. Chris Houser is a Coastal Geomorphologist and the Dean of science at the University of Windsor.



### RIP CURRENTS KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

**IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT**

- Relax
- Don't swim against 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

**ESCAPE** (indicated by red arrows pointing outwards from the rip current)

**CURRENT** (indicated by black arrows pointing away from shore)

**RIP CURRENT** (indicated by a black arrow pointing away from shore)

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

## Save the dates

**July 15 to 21** – National Drowning Prevention Week, Everywhere

**August 4** – Maritime Surf Lifesaving Championships, Martinique Beach, NS

**August 13** – NB Waterfront Lifesaving Championships, Parlee Beach, NB

**August 24-26** – Canadian Surf Lifesaving Championships, Lac Simon, QC

**November 7** – Maritime Lifeguard Emergency Response Competition, YMCA of Greater Moncton

## National Drowning Prevention Week 2018

The Lifesaving Society designates the third full week in July as National Drowning Prevention Week (NDPW) to focus community and media attention on the drowning problem and drowning prevention.

NDPW provides a focus around which community Water Smart® educators can plan news releases, do television and radio interviews, run public demonstrations, deliver public training events, and otherwise promote drowning prevention messages and events. Many successful community events are launched with a Mayor's Proclamation of Drowning Prevention Week.

There are various themes and suggestions for how you can target your NDPW campaign and use specific messages to address trends found in the Society's drowning reports and the data from the Drowning Prevention Research Centre. Use the key messages on social media and be sure to include the **#NDPW2018** and **#SNPN2018** hashtags.



The Lifesaving Society acknowledges and thanks the Government of New Brunswick for its ongoing support of our drowning prevention mission.

The Lifesaving Society is a national, volunteer organization and registered charity working to prevent drowning and water-related injury. Annually, over 1,000,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard and leadership training programs. The Society sets the standard for aquatic safety in Canada and certifies Canada's National Lifeguards.