

Beach Safety Tips

Throughout Lake Erie there is an interconnected circulation system powered by wind, waves, the sun, river flow and water density differences. The shape of Lake Erie's lakebed, its shore and the human-made structures along the shore influence the path of circulation.

Winds blowing across Erie's 127.7 trillion gallons of water create waves. When the waves interact with the lakebed, shore and human-made structures, various phenomena may occur which do not happen on inland lakes or in swimming pools. By making oneself aware of these conditions and what to do in an emergency, one can help ensure they explore the shore safely.

Rip currents

Due to lakebed variations, waves may break strongly in some locations and weakly in others causing the water to converge in narrow, river-like currents moving away from shore. These are known as rip currents and can occur at any beach with breaking waves.

Rip currents do not pull people under the water; they pull people away from shore. The size and lakeward pull of rip currents varies. Drowning usually occurs when people panic and are unable to keep themselves afloat.

Signs of rip currents can include a channel of churning, choppy water; an area of water of a different color; a line of algae or debris moving steadily offshore; or a break in the incoming wave pattern (waves usually do not break as readily in a rip current as in adjacent water).

Rip currents are more likely to form near beaches with a sand bar and channel system in the near shore. They can also occur when a water current traveling along the shore is interrupted by a structure such as a groin or jetty. Extra precaution should be taken when swimming near shore structures.

If caught in a rip current, you will feel yourself being pulled away from the shore. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recommends taking the following actions:

- Remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Never fight the current. Instead, swim out of the current in a direction parallel to the shore or float/tread water until the current stops pulling you lakeward.

- When out of the current, swim at an angle away from the current toward the shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself by waving your arm and yelling for help.

If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard, or call 9-1-1; throw the victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape.

SwimSafe! and *Wear It Ohio!* Beach safety tips:

- Swim only in designated areas.
- Encourage children and those who are not strong swimmers to wear life jackets - especially while swimming during high wave action.
- Designate one person to remain on the beach to watch those who are swimming.
- Exercise caution since lakes may have unseen drop-offs in the lakebed.
- Take a cell phone to make an emergency call if necessary.
- Be aware of heavy wave action and strong currents.

Lake Erie Boating

Registrations are required for every recreational boat in Ohio, including canoes, kayaks, pedal boats and inflatable boats with two or more cells. Boat owners renewing their registration may do so online; new registrations can be obtained at any ODNR Division of Watercraft office and at more than 150 independent Watercraft Registration Agents throughout the state.

People born on or after January 1, 1982, who operate a boat on Ohio water that is powered by greater than a 10 horsepower engine, must successfully pass a NASBLA-approved (National Association of State Boating Law Administrators) boating education course or proficiency exam. Ohio law requires life jackets to be worn while riding a personal watercraft, while waterskiing or while being towed on a similar device, and by children less than 10 years of age on any vessel less than 18-feet long. Additionally, it is particularly important to wear a life jacket when the boater cannot swim or is a weak swimmer; when boating alone; when the water is dangerously cold (October through May in Ohio); during rough water/waves and severe weather conditions; when boating at night; in emergency situations and in swift and fast currents.

Learn more: ohiodnr.com/watercraft

