SOS Fact Sheet

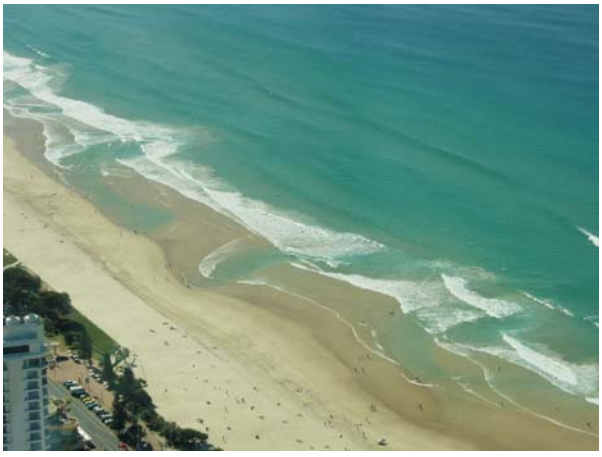
RIP CURRENTS

What are Rip Currents?

Rips are strong, narrow currents that flow from the shoreline seaward past the breaking waves. They exist as a way of getting water carried to the beach by breaking waves back out to sea and are usually confined to deeper channels between shallow sand bars. The bigger the waves, the stronger the rip. Think of them as "rivers of the sea".

Types of Rips

- Low energy rips are the most common and occur when waves are smaller or haven't changed in a while. They are usually fixed in place and sit in channels between sand bars and don't move much.
- High energy or flash rips are bigger and occur when waves have increased suddenly, or during a storm. They tend to move around a bit and flow faster.
- Headland and fixed rips are often permanent and occur next to headlands and structures such as groynes and jetties.



Low Energy Rip

High Energy Rip

Are Rips Dangerous?

Rips are only dangerous if you don't understand what they are and you are not a good swimmer. They can carry you more than 100 m offshore in less than a minute and are the major cause of surf drownings and rescues in Australia. However, surfers use rips to their advantage to help them swim out through the surf quickly.

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continued

Spotting a Rip

Since rips often sit in deeper channels between shallow sand bars, always spend 5-10 minutes looking at the surf zone for consistent darker and "calmer" areas of water that extend offshore between the breaking waves. Rips flow against the direction of the incoming waves so there's often a weird, disturbed surface compared to the rest of the surf. Rips also move things so look for moving sand, seaweed, foam and people!

Dark areas indicate the rip

How do you get out of a rip?

- The most important thing is DON'T PANIC! The rip won't pull you under the water and drown you, it will just carry you seaward.
- Do not swim against the rip or else you will tire quickly. Either swim to the side, or let it take you out to the back of the surf and signal for help.
- Don't get caught in one in the first place! Make sure you understand what rips are and ALWAYS swim between the flags on patrolled beaches.

Fast Facts about Rips

- Rips flow fastest around low tide
- Rip speed increases rapidly (pulses) shortly after wave sets break
- Typical rips flow faster than Olympic swimmers!
- On long beaches in NSW and QLD, rips occur approximately every 200 m

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