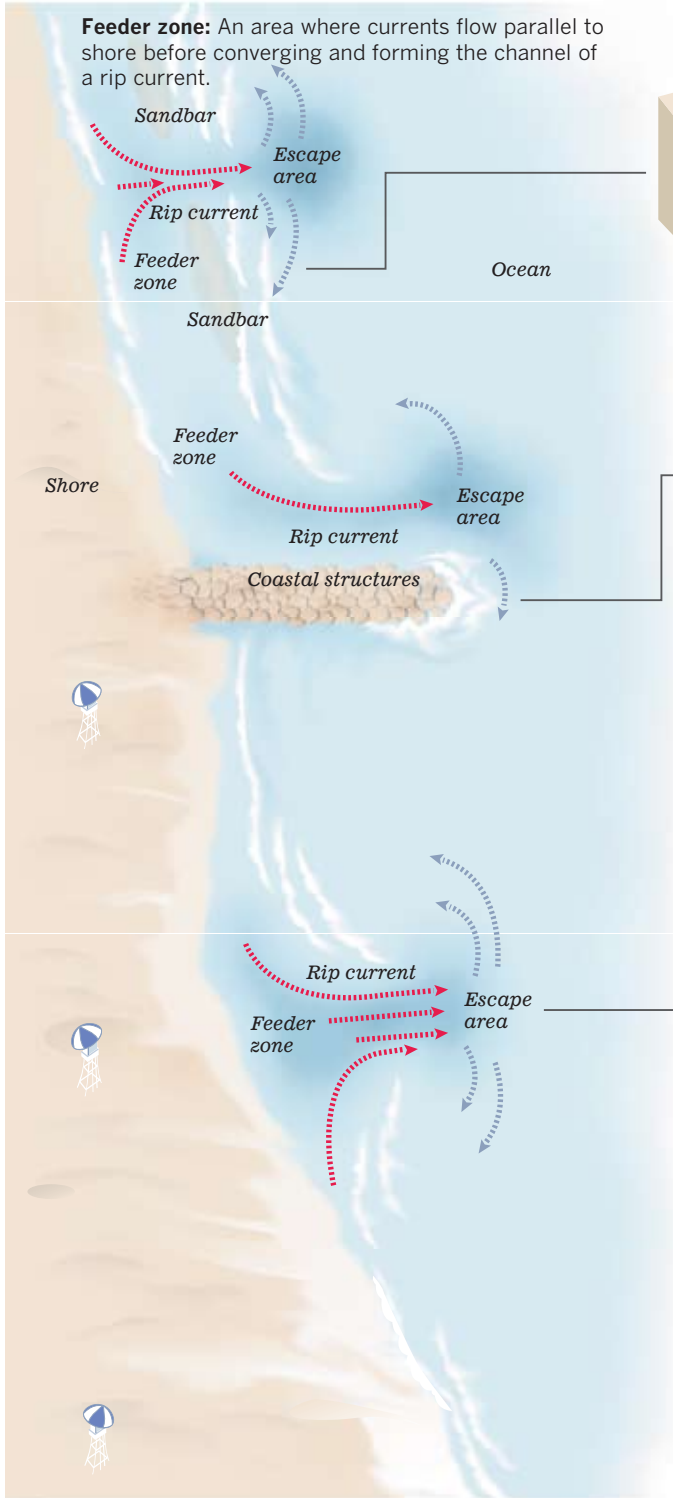


Rip currents: a danger at the beach

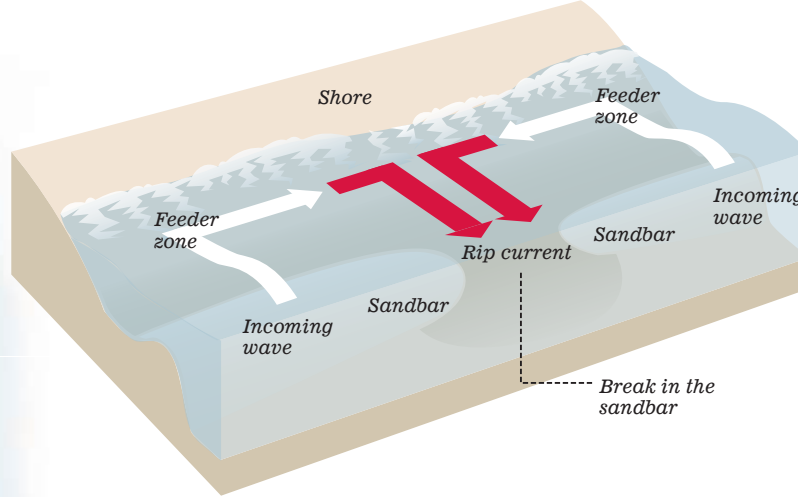
Rip currents, fast-moving narrow channels of water moving away from shore, can happen at any shoreline that has waves. The currents typically move at 1 to 2 feet per second but can rapidly increase in speed. Rip currents have been measured at speeds up to 8 feet per second, which can pull even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

Where they form

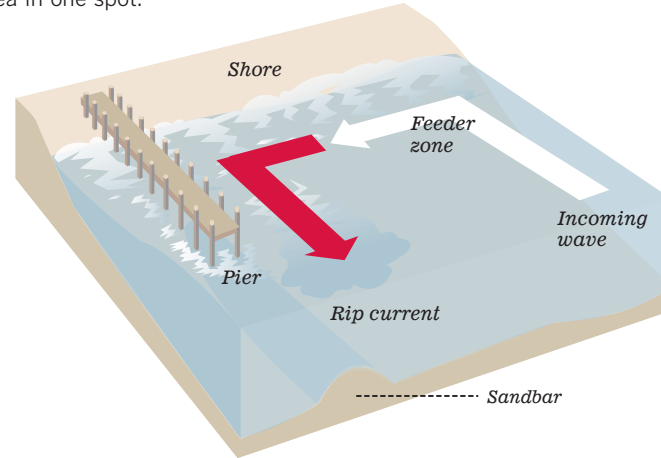
Rip currents can occur at any surf beach with breaking waves, including the Great Lakes. They typically extend from the shoreline through the surf zone and past the line of breaking waves. Eighty percent of rescues performed by beach lifeguards are related to rip currents.



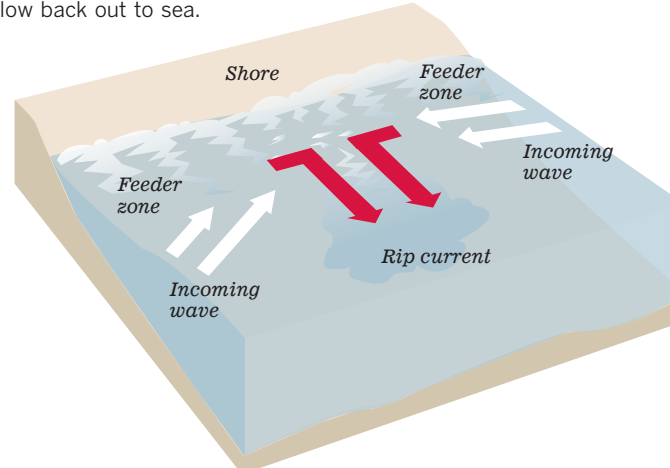
Sandbars: Incoming waves bring large volumes of water over sandbars. Currents run along the shore, and when the water finds a break in the sandbar, it rushes back out to sea.



Structures: Jetties, piers and other man-made structures block currents that run along the shore, forcing water to flow back out to sea in one spot.



Intersecting waves: Waves break strongly in some locations and more weakly in others, which causes uneven water buildup along the beach. A rip current can form where the water finds the least resistance to flow back out to sea.



Spotting rip currents

Look for:

- A channel of churning, choppy water



- An area with a notable difference in water color



- A line of foam, seaweed or other debris moving out to sea



- A bow in the incoming wave pattern



Escaping danger

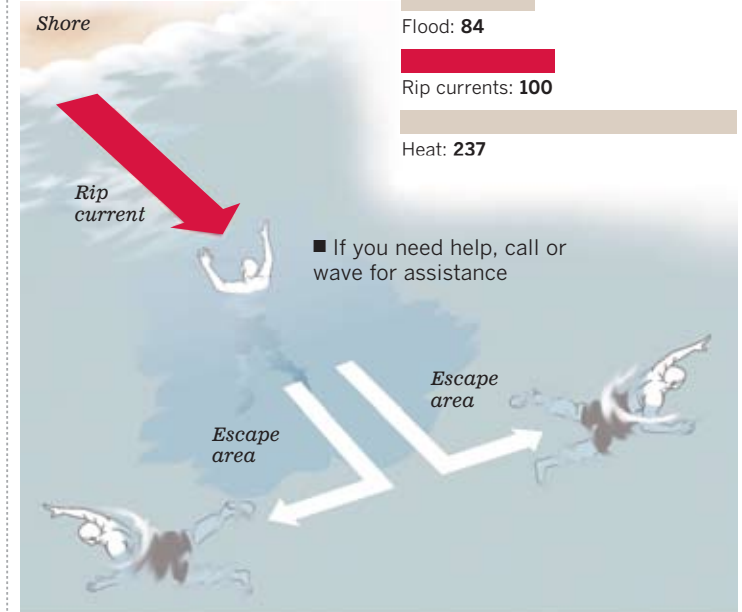
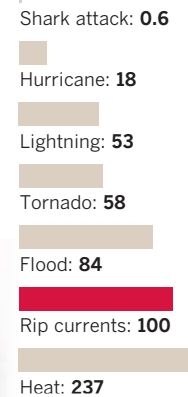
Rip currents move out to sea; they don't pull people under the water. If caught in a rip:

- Remain calm to conserve energy.
- Don't fight the current. Swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the rip and then swim back toward shore.
- If you can't swim out of the current, let it carry you until it naturally dissipates, then swim back to shore.

Fatalities

People can drown in rip currents when they exhaust themselves fighting the current, panic or lack swimming skills.

Average annual deaths (based on a 10-year average, 1994-2003)



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