Playing in rough surf with its huge rolling waves may look like an adventure, but currents created from these conditions can turn a day of fun into a day of tragedy. Not even the strongest swimmer is a match for the power of water. If you see someone struggling in the water, call 911 immediately.

The best safeguard against beach drownings — watch for posted flag warnings for surf conditions.

Beach Hazards

Rip tide and undertow are caused when strong surf washes a narrow trench through a sandbar. A band of water a few feet wide can get caught in this trough as it rushes from shore, creating a turbulent, fast flowing current that pulls you into deep water and away from the beach.

Do not Panic!

Don’t try to fight the current and attempt to swim straight to shore. Rip tide and undertow are narrow bands of water, usually only a few feet wide, and the outward pull diminishes the farther you get from shore. Remain calm. When the current’s pull weakens a little, swim parallel to the beach until you break free of the current; then swim to shore.