Beach Safety for the North Oregon Coast

Draft, Spring 08. Pat Corcoran, Hazards Outreach Specialist, OSU Sea Grant Extension, Clatsop County (503-325-8573).

Atmospheric conditions vs. Oceanic conditions
Just because it’s a nice sunny day doesn’t mean that the ocean conditions are nice too. Turbulent ocean conditions can last for days after the skies clear. Observe the condition of the ocean for rough waves, rip currents, tidal stage, and marine debris.

Cold water
Ocean temperatures on the north coast are cold. Temps range in the 40s and 50’s even in the summer. Wet suits and PFD’s (life preservers) are advised.

Isolation
Many north coast beaches are isolated (e.g. Short Sands). Cell phones may not work. Help may be a long way away.

Few lifeguards
There are few lifeguards on north coast beaches, and they only work during the summer.

Alcohol
Enjoy in moderation. As in, mod-er-a-tion.

PFD (Personal floatation device)
Wearing PFDs (aka life preservers) is an excellent idea for anyone playing in the surf. Children should always wear a PFD at the beach.

Tides
Our twice-daily tides can vary over 10 feet from lowest to highest. Whatever the situation when you get to the beach, it will change during your visit—sometimes dramatically. If you’re unfamiliar with tides, learn how to use a tide table. Ask around to be sure.

Rocks and Jetties
Rising tides can isolate people who climb onto rocks and jetties. Likewise, walking around a sandy point at low tide might not be
possible at high tide a few hours later. If you’re unfamiliar with tides, learn how to use a tide table.

**Rip currents**
After a wave washes onto shore, it washes back out again. This action can create narrow, but powerful, rip currents at various points along the beach. Rip currents can knock people down and move them out to deeper water. If you get caught in a rip current, swim sideways to the current—to escape its pull. Then swim toward shore. If you are helping someone from shore, move down the beach 50’ and instruct them to “swim to you.” Rip currents are often tricky to see from shore, but look for narrow streams of water moving against the grain. You may also see debris or foam floating in the rip.

**Sneaker waves**
Sneaker waves are larger waves that arrive without warning. Be aware of the ocean at all times and give yourself a generous buffer between you and the surf. During winter storms, sneaker waves can easily sweep over jetties and take people out to sea.

**Wet logs**
Logs in the surf and on wet sand are tempting to play on, but they are potentially very dangerous. Water saturated logs are extremely heavy and can crush bones when moved around by the surf. Bleached, dry, logs high in the beach grass are usually safe. But remember, the ocean put the logs there and it can move them around at any time.

**Earthquakes and tsunamis**
Earthquakes and tsunamis are rare, but real, occurrences on the north coast. If you are at the beach and feel an earthquake, immediately move inland and to high ground (at least 50-75 feet above sea level). If you hear sirens, immediately evacuate the beach and listen to the radio for more information.

**Trails and cliffs**
Beach access trails are sometimes hazards in themselves—especially in winter. Slick footing, steep trails, cliff edges, and falling rocks are common hazards. Keep on posted trails, obey all signs, wear sturdy shoes, and keep a close eye on children.