

## **Christie Administration, American Red Cross Urge Water Safety As Summer Vacation Season Heads Into Peak Homestretch**

(14/P79) TRENTON – As New Jersey heads into the homestretch of the summer season, the Christie Administration and American Red Cross remind the public to always exercise caution and common sense when enjoying the water, whether at a state park or on any of the state's inland or coastal waters.

“We are heading into the peak vacation period and are very fortunate to have an abundance of water for summer fun,” said Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bob Martin. “In addition to our world-famous ocean beaches, we have an amazing array of bays, lakes, rivers, reservoirs and streams that provide countless opportunities for swimming, boating, kayaking, canoeing, and fishing.”

But any body of water comes with unique risks no matter how inviting and refreshing they appear, including rip currents in the ocean, deceptively swift currents in a river, or the unexpected cold water that lies just below the surface of a lake.

“People spend a lot of time in and around the water at this time of year, so now is a great time to review water safety precautions so you know what to do to keep yourself and your family safe,” said Nancy Orlando, CEO for the South Jersey Region of the American Red Cross.

When packing up the swimsuits, sunscreen, water shoes and fishing gear, the DEP and American Red Cross urge you to familiarize yourself with the water environment you plan to enjoy, pack appropriate safety gear, and remember the following safety tips:

- Swim at lifeguarded beaches and follow local rules on the use of life jackets for children and those who don't know how to swim.
- Swim with a partner.
- Pay especially close attention to children and elderly persons when at the beach. Even in shallow water, wave action can cause a loss of footing.
- Leave the water immediately if a storm is approaching. Get off the beach and as far away from the water as possible.
- Boaters and anglers should always wear a personal flotation device. Kayakers and canoeists especially should wear protective water suits in situations in which cold water may be expected.

- Even if you do not plan on swimming, be cautious around natural bodies of water including ocean shorelines, rivers and lakes. Cold temperatures, currents and underwater hazards can make a fall into these bodies of water dangerous.
- Anglers should wear a life jacket if wading into water with strong currents.
- Rip currents are the leading hazard at ocean beaches. Beachgoers should be aware of how dangerous rip currents are, and swim only at designated areas with lifeguards. Rip currents can form in any large open water area, and tend to form at low spots and breaks in sandbars, or near structures such as jetties and piers. They are often visible as ribbons of choppy water that flow perpendicular to the beach.
- Rip currents do not pull people under the water – they pull people away from shore. Drowning deaths occur when people pulled offshore are unable to keep themselves afloat and swim to shore. This may be due to any combination of fear, panic, exhaustion, or lack of swimming skills.
- If you are caught in a rip current, stay calm and don't fight the current. Swim parallel to the beach until you are out of the current. Once you are free, turn and swim toward shore. If you can't swim to the shore, float or tread water until you are free of the rip current and then head toward shore. If you feel you can't make it to the shore, draw attention to yourself by waving and calling for help.
- If you see someone in trouble in a rip current, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1. Rip currents can be stronger than the strongest swimmer. Avoid becoming a victim yourself and throw the victim something that floats, such as a lifejacket, cooler, raft, or inflatable ball.

“There are few better ways to cap your summer season than to visit one of our spectacular state parks that offer water recreation, such as Island Beach State Park, Round Valley Recreation Area, or Waywayanda State Park, to name a few,” said Mark Texel, Director of the New Jersey State Park Service. “Ensure an enjoyable time by doing a little homework – and by always placing safety first.”

For more water safety information from the American Red Cross, visit: [www.redcross.org/watersafetytips](http://www.redcross.org/watersafetytips).

For more information on New Jersey's parks, visit:

[www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/](http://www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/), where you can also find information on downloading the Division of Parks and Forestry's Pocket Ranger mobile phone app.

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