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#100709-REDFLAG

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***Visitors and Residents Cautioned to Heed Flag Warnings,  
Practice Rip Current Safety***

Visitors and residents are encouraged not to swim in Gulf waters whenever red flags are flying. Yesterday, over 60 people required water rescues by lifeguards or emergency crews with three requiring transport to local hospitals and one death. Red flags indicate high surf conditions and a high possibility of rip currents. Rip currents can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea and beach goers are reminded to never underestimate the power of the Gulf of Mexico.

Rip currents are particularly dangerous for weak swimmers and those unfamiliar with how to react. Rip currents do not pull people under water but pull people away from shore. Drowning deaths usually occur when people are unable to keep themselves afloat and swim back to shore. This may be due to fear, panic, exhaustion, a lack of swimming skills, or any combination of these factors.

When visiting any beach, please follow these rip current safety tips:

- Never swim alone or at an unguarded beach.
- Follow the posted beach condition flag warnings:
  - Green Flag- means “low hazard,” but you should still exercise caution
  - Yellow flag- indicates “moderate surf and conditions” such as rip currents, swimmers should exercise careful caution when entering the water
  - Red flag - “strong currents and high surf” and you are not advised to enter the water
  - Double red flags- the water is closed for swimming. Conditions are extremely dangerous and lifeguards will not be entering the water to rescue you if something were to happen.
  - Purple flag- indicates “dangerous marine wildlife” maybe present. This flag could mean a high population of jellyfish have been spotted or even a shark. Please use caution when entering the water.
- When you arrive at the beach ask the on-duty lifeguard about rip currents and other conditions expected for the day.
- Obey all instructions and rules from lifeguards.
- Learn how to spot a rip current- Most often rip currents are identified by a channel of churning, choppy water, an area having a notable difference in water color, a line of foam, seaweed, or debris moving steadily seaward, or a break in the incoming wave pattern.
- Don’t fight the current.
- Don’t swim straight into shore; instead swim diagonally until you do not feel the rip current’s pull. Then you can swim to shore.
- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If lifeguards are not available, have someone call 911. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. Remember, many people drown trying to save someone else from a rip current.

The United States Lifesaving Association estimates that rip currents account for over 80 percent of rescues performed by lifeguards. Rip Currents are most dangerous during high surf conditions as the wave height and wave period increase. It can be very narrow, or can extend in widths up to 50 yards wide or more. The seaward pull of a rip current can end just beyond the line of breaking waves, or it can continue to flow hundreds of yards out to sea. Rip current speeds are typically one to two feet per second, but speeds as high as eight feet per

second have been measured. Typically forming at low spots or breaks in sandbars and near structures such as groins, jetties and piers, rip currents can be very narrow or extend in widths currents.

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