

New water safety tips for parents and youth

May 18 2015, by Jim Erickson



Credit: Todd Marsee, Michigan Sea Grant

With summer just around the corner, millions of swimmers will enjoy Michigan's Great Lakes beaches and cool water, but waves and currents can be deadly.

Since 2002, dangerous currents and waves along Lake Michigan have

claimed the lives of 57 swimmers in Michigan alone, according to the National Weather Service.

To address this threat to swimmers, a University of Michigan-led team of communications and outreach experts has developed a suite of water safety messages and products.

The "Be Current Smart" campaign includes animations targeted to youth and video news release footage with interviews from the U.S. Coast Guard, county sheriffs and park officials, produced by U-M's Michigan Creative. Other products produced at U-M include beach sign templates, publications, curriculums, and diagrams and descriptions of the types of dangerous currents. Two of the new signs focus on structural currents—encouraging swimmers to avoid piers and breakwalls—and the Flag Warning System.

"We're excited to roll out a new water safety campaign, 'Be Current Smart,' in cooperation with a network of partners in Michigan and throughout the Great Lakes region," said Elizabeth LaPorte, science outreach manager for U-M's Graham Sustainability Institute. "This comprehensive campaign, tailored for Michigan and the region, includes some top-notch products, free and available for beach communities, park staff, educators and others."

The U-M-based team members are from Michigan Sea Grant, Michigan Creative and the Graham Sustainability Institute. They collaborated with colleagues at Michigan State University, Michigan Technological University, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the National Weather Service.

LaPorte and others have led efforts to deploy [water safety](#) and emergency rescue equipment—including U.S. Coast Guard-approved ring buoys and life jackets—at public beaches in Michigan and

throughout the region. First responders say it's critical to quickly help someone in trouble by tossing a ring buoy or anything that floats.

"We want everyone to be safe at the beach and in the water so they can enjoy the day at our wonderful beaches," said Matt Warner, coastal hazards specialist with the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program. "Simple safety steps like having children wear life jackets and paying attention to the beach flag warning system are easy to do."

Many beaches use a beach flag warning system to inform visitors of the level of swim risk present. Look for the flag warning system when you arrive at the beach, and watch for changes because conditions can change quickly on the Great Lakes.

Remember: Stay dry when the waves are high. When the red flag is raised, stay out of the water and enjoy the beach.

Rip currents can flow very fast away from shore. If caught in a rip current, the best means of escape is to swim to the side, out of the current and then back to shore. An important message for parents: Keep a close eye on children while in or near the water and have them wear life jackets. Also, experts advise swimmers to "steer clear of piers" and avoid getting trapped in danger zones near piers. Piers are one of the most dangerous areas, with many fatalities occurring near these structures. New messages advise swimmers to stay in marked swimming areas.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Office of the Great Lakes Coastal Zone Management Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service and NOAA's Coastal Storms Program, as well as the Sea Grant programs throughout the region, have supported this effort.

More information: For more information about the "Be Current Smart" campaign, contact LaPorte at 734-763-0061 or elzblap@umich.edu, or visit www.currentsmart.org.

Provided by University of Michigan

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