



2007 Year
of the Surf
Lifesaver

Reading this may save your life!

Rips – our biggest killer in the surf

Each year approximately 60 people drown around the Australian coast while many more get into serious trouble. This happens because many people can't recognise a rip and don't know what to do if they get caught in one.

What is a rip?

A rip is a strong current running out to sea on a surf beach. Other common names for such currents are 'riptides', 'undertows' or 'run outs'. Most beaches have rips, although they vary depending on tides, wave size and beach type.

A rip can quickly drag swimmers from shallow water and take them several hundred metres offshore. Experienced surfers or bodysurfers use the rip to quickly take them out to the 'break' (the area where the waves are breaking).

How do I recognise a rip?

Identifying a rip can be very difficult as they vary, depending on conditions and beach type. Generally though, you should look out for the following signs:

- Darker coloured water, indicating deeper channels.
- Murky brown water caused by sand stirred up off the bottom.
- A smoother surface with much smaller waves, alongside areas of white water (or broken waves).
- Waves breaking further out to sea on both sides of a channel.
- Debris floating out to sea along the same channel.
- A rippled look, when the water around is generally calm.





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What do I do if I get caught in rip?

Remember the safest place to swim is between the red and yellow flags. If in doubt, check with a surf lifesaver or lifeguard about the conditions at your local beach. However, if you are caught in a rip, remember the following:

- Don't panic – stay calm.
- Put your hand in the air to signal for help.
- If you are a weak or tired swimmer, float with the current and don't fight it. Swim parallel to the shore for about 30 – 40m, until you reach the breaking wave zone, then swim back to shore.
- If you are a stronger swimmer, swim at a 45° angle across the rip, and in the same direction as the side current, then return to shore.
- Remember to stay calm and conserve your energy.

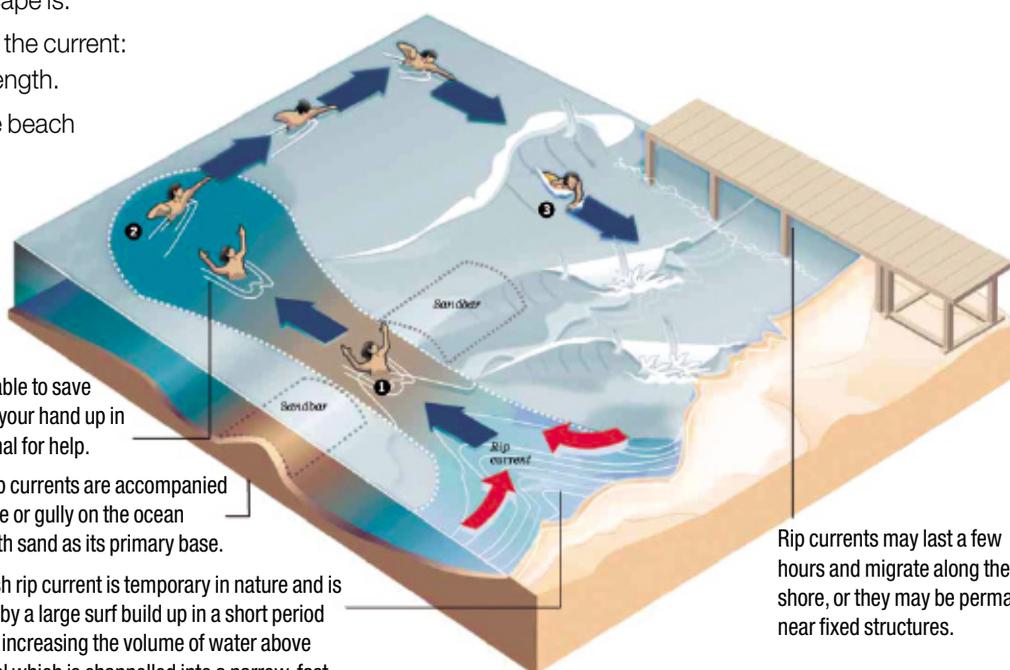
The grip of the rip

Rip currents can occur along any coastline with breaking waves. They are commonly created when a large amount of water is funneled by natural and man-made features – sandbars, piers, drainage outlets and troughs – into narrow channels, then out to sea.

Escaping a rip current

A common mistake made by swimmers caught in a rip current is to try to swim straight to shore. The proper way to escape is:

1. Don't swim against the current: this can drain your strength.
2. Swim parallel to the beach until the rip current disappears.
3. Swim toward the shore, riding incoming waves if possible.



If you are unable to save yourself, put your hand up in the air to signal for help.

Fixed rip currents are accompanied by a hole or gully on the ocean floor with sand as its primary base.

The flash rip current is temporary in nature and is caused by a large surf build up in a short period of time, increasing the volume of water above sea level which is channelled into a narrow, fast moving outward flow.

Rip currents may last a few hours and migrate along the shore, or they may be permanent near fixed structures.

IMAGE COURTESY OF MARK HARPER – LOS ANGELES TIMES