

Summer edition 3 February 2013

Rip current dangers highlighted by drop of dye in the ocean

A number of bay and coastal clubs participated in a rip current awareness day last month, releasing an environmentally friendly dye into the ocean to highlight what a rip current looks like and the dangers they present to swimmers caught unawares.

Rip currents are the number one hazard on Australia's beaches and are the cause of most rescues and many drowning deaths every year.

Surf Life Saving Australia's National Coastal Safety Report 2012 found that 20 per cent of coastal drowning deaths (22) were attributed to rip currents.

With the temperature well over 30 degrees, Portsea SLSC held their rip current dye release with a packed audience on the beach, including a Channel Nine News crew, on Thursday 3 January.

The dye release was featured on Nine News as an exclusive the following Monday evening, educating the public on what a rip current looks like and what to do if caught in one.

In challenging conditions, Gunnamatta SLSC educated their nippers about the dangers of rip currents at their weekly nippers training on Wednesday 9 January, using yellow sea marker dye.

Sorrento SLSC chose to demonstrate its dye release as part of its club open day on Sunday 13 January. This was the perfect opportunity for the club to highlight to members, family and friends about how to identify a rip and what to do if you do get caught in one.



Rip Current dye release at Portsea



Rip Current dye release at Gunnamatta



Rip Current dye release at Sorrento

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And the florescent yellow dye also highlighted the rip current at Wye River on Wednesday 2, January, demonstrating to interested nippers and local media about local rips.

LSV General Manager Lifesaving Paul Shannon says rip currents are often difficult to identify.

“Many people don’t realise they are caught in one until they find themselves being taken away from the beach and unable to get back,” he said.

“The dye release clearly shows us where the rip current starts and how it flows out to sea.

A rip current is a moving current of water, sometimes strong or fast flowing. It will usually start near the shoreline and flow away from the beach, taking water from the breaking waves back out to sea.

Mr Shannon said that to those who are unaware, rip currents can often look like a calm place to swim, away from breaking waves.

“There is a misconception that because the water is calm, it is safe and this is sometimes where people choose to swim as an alternative to between the red and yellow flags.

“Unfortunately, these waters present the typical appearance of where rip currents begin; the surface of the water often has a calmer appearance with ripples on the surface indicting a subtle flow of water away from the beach.”

Rip currents often lead to drowning when swimmers attempt to fight the current, become exhausted and begin to panic.

Mr Shannon said the most important thing to do if you find yourself caught in a rip current, is not to panic.



Rip current release at Wye River

“You need to conserve your energy; panicking and trying to swim directly back to shore is only going to exhaust you.

“If you are a strong swimmer, you can swim parallel to the beach, toward the breaking waves, where you can use these to get back into shore.

“If you are not a strong swimmer, or are tired, you should float, raise one arm, and signal and call for help.

“We urge people to swim between the red and yellow flags, where our lifesavers and lifeguards are looking out for you.

“Our lifesavers and lifeguards monitor the beach conditions closely and ensure this marked swimming area is away from rips.”

Know your options to survive a rip current:

- To avoid rip currents, always swim between the red and yellow flags.
- If you need help; stay calm, float, and raise an arm to attract attention.
- To escape a rip, swim parallel to the beach
- Always conserve your energy; the waves can assist you back to the beach.