Mackinac County Water Safety Review Team: Educating the Public on Rip Currents

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Michigan Sea Grant
Mackinac County Water Safety Review Team

- Organized in 1998 shortly after the drowning of 12 year old Travis Brown at U.S. Forest Service Lake Michigan campground.
- Increase public awareness of rip currents in the Great Lakes.
- Prevent future drownings in high risk area of northern Lake Michigan in Mackinac county
Water Safety Team Members

- Travis Brown Family
- Mackinac County Sheriff’s Dept.
- Michigan State Police
- Mackinac Co Office of Emergency Services
- MSU Extension and Sea Grant
- St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce
- Allied EMS
- Mackinac County 911
- St. Ignace News
- National Weather Service
- Luce, Mackinac, Alger, Schoolcraft County Health Dept.
- Hiawatha National Forest
- First National Bank of St. Ignace
- Cellular One
- Dune Shores Resort
- Moran Township
- MI Dept. Of Transportation
- MI DNR
- U.S. Coast Guard
- Marine Hydrodynamics Laboratories (U.M.)
Mackinac County Water Safety Review Team Projects

- Brochure development
- Public outreach
- Rip current signage
- Rescue stations
- Logo contest
- Public service announcements
- Great Lakes Rip Current Conference
Brochure Development

- Local brochure produced by Mackinac County Water Safety Review Team
National Brochure

- National brochure supported by 10 Sea Grant Programs including MI and WI Sea Grant
Public Outreach: Rip Current Display

- Rip current education display
- Used in conjunction with training events such as state park training and various educational fairs
Public Outreach: Safe Summer Display
Public Outreach: Rip Current Informational Workshop

- Outdoor event on Northern Lake Michigan
Public Outreach: Rip Current Informational Workshop

- Outdoor event on Northern Lake Michigan complete with black flies
Public Outreach: U.P. Rip Current Workshop

- Held in St. Ignace
- Audience included park managers, emergency rescue personnel, and law enforcement
Rip Current Signage

Signs located at key access points to heavily used beach areas
Utilization of National Rip Current Sign

RIP CURRENTS
Break the Grip of the Rip!

IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT
◆ Don't fight the current
◆ Swim out of the current, then to shore
◆ If you can't escape, float or tread water
◆ If you need help, call or wave for assistance

SAFETY
◆ Know how to swim
◆ Never swim alone
◆ If in doubt, don't go out

Rip currents are powerful currents of water moving away from shore. They can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

More information about rip currents can be found at the following web sites:
- www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov
- www.nmfs.org
- www.miseagrant.unl.gov

Sea Grant
Four Solar Powered Cell Phones on Site

Direct connection to 911
Emergency Phone Replacement

- Analog phones that are on site will no longer be functional
- Explored digital phones but would be very costly
Nine Rescue Stations

Equipped with life vests, rescue board and life ring
New Rescue Stations (2005)
Lifesaving Equipment
Lifesaving Equipment
Logo Contest

• Students in area schools were awarded U.S. Saving Bonds for the best logo design
2004 Great Lakes Rip Current Conference

- Mackinac County Water Safety Review Team
- MSU Extension
- MI, MN, WI, OH, and PA Sea Grant Programs
- Dept. of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering-Marine Hydrodynamics Laboratories-College of Engineering-U.M.
- National Weather Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
- Great Lakes Beach and Pier Safety Task Force
- Upper Peninsula Emergency Medical Services
National Weather Service
Transmitter Tower

• NOAA transmission inadequate for Straits area
• MCWSRT worked with Emmett County Emergency Services
• There is a tower site in Emmett County now equipped with transmitter
This location now covers Emmett County and southern Mackinac County.
NOAA Weather Radio

Brand New Transmitter
Good Hart, MI
Broadcasting on 162.475 MHz
Rip Current Forecasts

- Obtained through two methods
  - Hazardous Weather Outlook (issued at least twice daily, 4 am and 4 pm)
  - Rip Current Statement, sent as CFWAPX (Gaylord) or CFWMQT (Marquette) are issued when criteria favor rip current development

- www.nws.noaa.gov or obtained via NOAA weather radio
Rip Currents on Weather Radio

• Example of statement on NOAA weather radio:
  “There is a risk of rip currents through tonight on Lake Michigan beaches along US-2 west of the Mackinac bridge, and on Lake Huron beaches along M-134 east of the Mackinac bridge”

• Rip current public safety messages played on NOAA weather radio during summer months.
Aerial Flyovers

- Assess potential rip current areas
Dye Observations (Wind S at 25 mph)
Steve Hernek (Hydraulic Engineer)
Dye Observations (Wind S at 25 mph)
Steve Hernek (Hydraulic Engineer)
Eruption of On-Shore Bars
Eruption of On-Short Bars
Helicopter Landing Site

- North Flight (Traverse City)
Water Safety Team Recognition

- U.S. Forest Service Eastern Regional Safety and Health Award (2000)
- Mackinac County Chamber of Commerce Award (2001)
- Mackinac County Board of Commissioners Award (2001)
Water Safety Team Recognition

- $3000 award from MI Public Health Institute (Kellogg Foundation) for “innovative and proactive” programs across the state (2002)
- H&D, Inc. of Petoskey annual financial award
- St. Ignace Community Foundation-two grants
- Local businesses and individuals have made monetary donations
2004 Honor Award from U.S. Forest Service

- In honor of outstanding accomplishments in rip current research and education
Questions?

Mackinac County

Water Safety Review Team

911

Follow Safety Rules