

# To stop people drowning in rips – educate them to save their lives.

A guide to the new rip currents campaign to educate all Australians about rip currents

Summer 2009-10

## *The Strategy*

<b>Ongoing primary message:</b>	“Always swim between the red and yellow flags”
<b>This year’s campaign focus:</b>	To educate all Australians about rip currents
<b>Primary message:</b>	“To escape a rip... swim parallel to the beach.”
<b>Secondary messages:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reinforce swim between the red and yellow flags</li><li>• What is a rip?</li><li>• How to identify a rip</li><li>• Stay Calm</li><li>• How to get assistance</li></ul>
<b>Primary target audience:</b>	Males between 25 and 34
<b>Secondary audience:</b>	All Australians



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### 1. Introduction

Australians are drowning in rip currents. In fact about 85 Australians have lost their lives over the last five years after being caught in a rip current and not being able to survive. These people panic, they try to get back to shore against the force of the rip current, they tire and they drown.

There is a lot of fear associated with rip currents – to most people they are a mystery; we've heard of them, but we probably couldn't identify one, and we're not sure or confident of what to do if we are caught in one.

On the other hand, most people are aware of the red and yellow flags; we know we are being watched by surf lifesavers and lifeguards and so we swim in between them. But not everyone chooses to swim between the red and yellow flags, and the red and yellow flags aren't on every beach at all times of the day.

On top of the very successful and ongoing campaign to educate people to swim between the red and yellow flags, Surf Life Saving like others are endeavouring to educate the public on rip currents. A campaign has been developed so that should people choose to not swim between the red and yellow flags, and they get caught in a rip current, they have a better chance of survival.

In this information guide to the rip current campaign, we will take you through the journey on why we need rip education, the dilemma in choosing a message that will have a meaningful result and recall, how the message will be delivered and how you can help in the effort of saving lives outside the red and yellow flags.

### 2. Why a rip current campaign?

In Australia there has been a strong history of public education in surf safety. We know that our the message of 'swim between the red and yellow flags' has almost universal recall by Australians.

Sadly, people continue to drown along our coastline. 174 drowning deaths occurred while people were swimming at beaches over the last five years. 85 (almost half) of these drowning deaths were reported as being in a rip current. Data shows that up to 89% of rescues by surf lifesavers or lifeguards occur in rip currents.

### 3. How was the campaign designed?

Years of rip current education and experience by a range of lifesaving professionals and academics has been the cornerstone of the rip current campaign. A review of past campaigns, public education and of current literature ensured any campaign decisions were based on factual data, best practice and expert opinions.

To ensure all the evidence collected was interpreted and delivered to the public in the best possible way, an external agency assisted in the development of a public safety campaign. The agency took the evidence provided, conducted further research on consumer behaviour – with a focus on the most at risk demographic (males 25-34) – and designed a simple, clear and effective message which would build in the hearts and minds of Australians much



the same as the swim between the red and yellow flags message does today.

#### 4. The Campaign

The campaign is designed to give all Australians an awareness of rip currents over the next three years. It will escalate into more complex messaging as it develops. This year the central focus will be to point to a rip education website [www.ripcurrents.com.au](http://www.ripcurrents.com.au). Driving people to the site, generation of rip awareness and initial survival knowledge will be the key campaign objectives.

#### 5. The message

“Always swim between the red and yellow flags” is a simple, clear and effective tag line – one that is easy to promote and easy to remember. However, educating the public about rip currents is not as easy. Do you teach them in a single message what a rip is? What a rip looks like? Where rips are located?

### **Why a pair of hands?**

*When you are caught in a rip you must instinctively react. Instinct comes from learning. Learning comes from consistency and repetition. And this is best aided by a visual device. A visual device is used to stand out, to get attention, to cut through and to aide in learning. When used consistently it can become something that can last for years and become iconic; embedded in our minds along with the knowledge to spot, avoid or escape a rip. And most critically, if that moment comes, our target market will be better equipped to instinctively know what to do.*

*The black and white hands were chosen because they stand out, are strong and authoritative. They are not synonymous with any particular location or situation. This is because we want people to remember “To escape a rip swim parallel to the beach” in their everyday life and to become part of everyday language.”*

How to escape from a rip? All of these questions have complex answers and our community surveys tell us that many are difficult to place in a simple, easy to understand message. Rip current education is best taught when people have time to concentrate and take it all in. Unfortunately, we can't reach every person in this manner, so we need to come up with a simple message which we can communicate easily and effectively but still have a chance of changing people's behaviour.

#### **“To escape a rip – swim parallel to the beach”**

This simple, clear and effective message is easy to remember, not cluttered with too much information and is transferable to a number of different media, such as TV and newspaper advertisement, billboards, bumper stickers etc. Most importantly, the message gives expert advice on how someone can save their own live if caught in a rip current.

For the most at risk group, 25-34 year old males in particular, this message reflects their attitude towards this type of public safety campaign. It does not demand anything of them, but with targeted media we can get this message to resonate in their minds should the time come they get caught in a rip current.

While we can reach the public through a simple, clear and effective message – we still need to educate them about rip currents. Secondary messages reinforce the primary message and include 'don't panic', 'stay calm' and 'signal for assistance'. And, as always, swim between the red and yellow flags.

Complementing the campaign message will be the text:

*Too many people are drowning in rip currents on Australian beaches every year. Some are good swimmers. Some are fit and healthy. Many are young. Most of them panic. Yet survival is simple. To escape a rip current stay calm and swim parallel to the beach. And remember always swim between the red and yellow flags. [ripcurrents.com.au](http://ripcurrents.com.au)*

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### 6. Delivering the message

Getting this message to all of the Australian public is a large undertaking, and a difficult one. Surf Life Saving is calling on all its stakeholders, from individual members, to club, branch and state offices to corporate partners, supporters and local council lifeguard services to ensure we spread the message far and wide.

Promotion of the campaign messages will be through many forms of media, including:

- At home (TV, newspapers, online),
- Out of home (bus shelters, billboards) and,
- On their way to/at the beach (radio, posters, clubs etc).

All stakeholders will be supplied with campaign information and resources, ensuring they can spread the message. By committing to the campaign, and using all our available networks and relationships with media we can cover more of the Australian public, ultimately ensuring an even more successful campaign.

### 7. How can I get involved?

Start by reading all the background information on the rip current campaign – the more you know the more you'll understand the campaign and be prepared to promote it. Then check out the campaign website [www.ripcurrents.com.au](http://www.ripcurrents.com.au) – it's got all the information you need and more; there's fact sheets, downloads, pictures and even a rip current video.

#### Surf life saving club or lifeguard service:

- Download the promotional resources from the website (or from the resource pack sent to every club/service) and print/distribute throughout your immediate community/beach.
- Send campaign advertisements to your local community newspaper and regional TV and radio stations.
- Hold an information evening and brief your membership/employees on the campaign.

- Get talking about the campaign: put it in your club/service newsletters, put posters up in your clubhouse, towers and on the walls outside.
- Put links on your website to [www.ripcurrents.com.au](http://www.ripcurrents.com.au)
- Do whatever it takes to get the message out there!

#### Surf lifesaver/lifeguard:

- Integrate the rip current message into your patrols, talk to the public and educate them while they are on the beach.
- Educate your friends and family.
- Spread the word: ***"To escape the rip – swim parallel to the beach!"***

### 8. Further information

To get further information on the rip campaign visit the Club/Lifeguard section of the rip website [www.ripcurrents.com.au](http://www.ripcurrents.com.au)

This section on the website includes the following information:

- A history of rip current campaigns.
- How do people react in life threatening situations?
- How will we know that the campaign has been successful?
- How does the campaign deliver the secondary messages?
- What do we know about the most at risk group?
- Why is it important that stakeholders get involved in the campaign?
- Can club/branch/lifeguard services logos be added to the promotional resources?
- Who to contact for further information?
- Case study – slip slop slap.

[www.ripcurrents.com.au](http://www.ripcurrents.com.au)

