



A Lifeguard's Beach Safety Tips

by Sgt. Ed Fisher
Special to the Dispatch

The writer is a 17-year veteran of the Beach patrol. In the off-season, he is an elementary school teacher in Montgomery County. The OCBP consist of over 200 men and women dedicated to ocean rescue and maintaining a safe and orderly environment on Ocean City's beach. The Sure Rescue Technicians guard the beach seven days a week from 10 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.



Never Turn Your Back on The Ocean

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Last week's message, "Swim near a lifeguard", is simple, but is no question one of the most important safety tips the Ocean City Beach Patrol can give. This week I am sticking with the theme of a basic one-line safety tip that can save a life.

Never turn your back on the ocean! It's a motto all lifeguards and true watermen or waterwomen live by. It's a motto that we would like all people to live by. There are two reasons to never turn your back on the ocean. First, safety and preventing serious injury is the primary reason to never turn your back on the ocean. People who turn their backs toward the sea while in the water are in great danger of getting a neck or back injury. Every summer we deal with dozens of serious neck and back injuries, many of which could have been prevented if the person had not turned their back on the ocean. Unsuspecting people who turn their backs to the sea are often taken off guard by a wave and slammed into the sandbar. Sometimes this can be the equivalent to being slammed headfirst into concrete. On the beach I have seen everything from dislocated shoulders, slipped discs, and spinal cord injuries that caused paralysis. Just being hit in the back or neck by a powerful wave is often enough to cause serious injury. Although we all are aware of the dangers of being rear-ended in a car accident and the possibility of a whiplash type neck injury, most people do not realize that being hit in the back by a wave that can carry several tons of water is the equivalent of a 25 mile per hour or greater rear-end collision. If everyone would pay attention and not turn their backs on the waves we would deal with a lot less neck and back trauma.

The other reason to not turn your back on the ocean is respect. A famous Hawaiian, Duke Kahanamoku, help popularize the motto, "Never turn your back on the ocean." Duke was a native Hawaiian who gained fame by helping make surfing an international sport and winning numerous gold medals at the Olympics. Duke was a lifeguard and recognized the safety value of not turning your back on the ocean, but also tried to teach people the same respect he and his Hawaiian ancestors had for the ocean.

Captain's Note:



The Ocean City Beach Patrol has worked with trauma Doctors to develop a specialized technique to manage suspected head, neck and back injuries. Although every Surf Rescue Technician is trained and skilled in the use of these techniques it is far better for our beach patrons to have injuries prevented rather than treated. Taking responsibility for your own actions and spreading the caution about spinal cord injuries is the greatest form of prevention we have. Many people just do not realize the awesome energy and power contained in a wave and that wet sand is just as unyielding as concrete and that it is the bones of the spinal column that cause the damage and possible paralysis that results from the impact of your head, neck or back with the beach. Most people would never think of crossing the street without looking both ways but will turn their

back to these powerful waves which could be just as dangerous to an unsuspecting person. Please, use your head to protect your spine and think before turning your back on the ocean, diving or riding breaking waves into the beach. Have fun but remain safe!



Beach Patrol trains and updates all personnel in many life saving techniques each season. Here guards are practicing the beginning of a technique used to extricate a victim with a possible spinal injury.



The OCBP trains all SRTs in neck back injury victim removal. Here guards from surrounding stands assist with victim removal with the key focus on supporting the back and neck to prevent further damage.