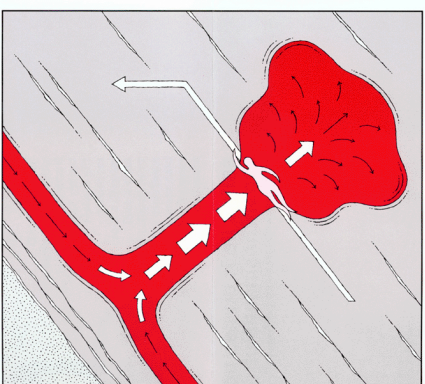
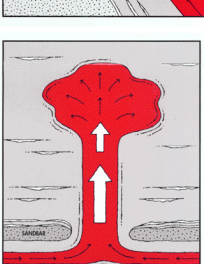
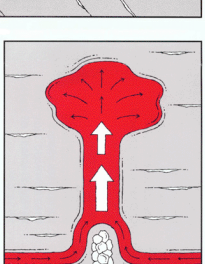
# RIP CURRENTS






## What is a Rip Current?

Rip currents can be killers.
Often misakenly called undertows, these powerful currents pull even experienced swimmers away from shore.
Panic and drowning often result. The currents are formed when water rushes out to sea in a narrow path.
This happens when there is a break in a nearshore sandbar or the current is diverted by a groin, jetty or other barrier.
Rip currents can extend 1,000 feet offshore, reach 100 feet in width and travel up to 3 mph.
Some are present a few hours; others are permanent. Rip currents are more prevalent after storms.

## Telltale Signs of Rip Currents

- A difference in water color (either marker from sediments or darker from greater depth).
- A difference in the waves — larger, choppier waves in the rip current; smaller, calmer waves in front of the bar.
- Foam or objects moving steadily seaward.
- An offshore plume of turbid water past the sandbars.

Polarized sunglasses cut glare and help to spot rip currents.

## What to Do

If you're caught in a rip current, don't panic or swim against the current.
Swim parallel to shore until you are out of the current. Rip currents are rarely more than 30 feet wide.
If you can't break out of the current, float calmly until it dissipates, usually just beyond the breakers.
Then swim diagonally to shore. If you don't swim well, stay in wading depths and watch for sudden drop-offs.

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