



SUMMER OUTDOOR

Weather Safety

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PHOTO BY CINDY THOMPSON

Summertime means vacation, road trips and spending time outdoors. The warmer months mean longer days for spending time at the beach, hiking along the trail or camping, or relaxing on the water. However, the weather and wave conditions can change suddenly and cause life-threatening conditions. It is essential to check the current and forecasted weather conditions before heading outdoors or on the water, to be prepared in the event of quickly developing thunderstorms.

Being prepared and knowledgeable about the weather conditions allows you to have fun and be ready to take any necessary precautions to stay safe in case the weather changes unexpectedly.

Here is additional information on some

weather hazards and tips for staying safe while you “Live Life Outdoors” this summer.

THUNDERSTORM AND LIGHTNING SAFETY

Thunderstorms can produce gusty and shifting winds, torrential rains, lightning and waterspouts. These hazards quickly turn a nice day on the water into a dangerous one, threatening anyone outdoors.

Lightning strikes are not only dangerous, but they can also be deadly. Lightning can strike up to 25 miles away from the parent thunderstorm. Lightning does not strike water as often as it does land, but when it does, it can spread out over the surface since water acts as a conductor, meaning it can hit nearby boats. Not only can lightning cause injuries and even

fatalities to boaters, but it can also knock out power and potentially cause a fire.

Here are some thunderstorm and lightning safety tips:

- Watch for signs of an approaching storm, including dark threatening clouds, increased wind speed and change in direction, and distant lightning.
- Heavy static on AM radio frequencies can indicate a nearby thunderstorm.
- If you hear thunder or see lightning and are on a boat, head to shore and find shelter on land and away from the water. If you cannot get to shore, make sure to have on a personal flotation device, get below deck, and do not touch metal or electronics.

- If you are at the beach, hiking or camping and hear thunder or see lightning, immediately find shelter in an enclosed building or hard-topped vehicle.

UV SAFETY

The UV Index forecasts the amount of skin-damaging UV radiation expected to reach the earth’s surface when the sun is highest in the sky (solar noon).

The amount of UV radiation reaching the surface is primarily related to the sun’s elevation in the sky, the amount of ozone in the stratosphere and any clouds present. The UV Index can range from 0 (when it is nighttime) to 15 or 16 (in the tropics at high elevations under clear skies).

Here are some simple ways to be “sun smart” and reduce your risk of UV exposure and sunburns:

- Seek shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., which are the peak burn hours.
- Use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.
- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside and reapply sunscreen every two hours, more frequently if swimming or sweating.
- Wear UV sun protective clothing (UPF), wide-brimmed hats and polarized sunglasses.

Even on days with clouds, UV exposure can still be high enough to cause sunburn.

HEAT SAFETY

What someone considers hot in one region maybe be different in another. Tourists visiting new places and even locals can be more susceptible to heat-related illnesses during the summer, depending on their level of acclimation. Acclimatization is how your body physically adjusts to the environment’s temperature and plays vital role in how well someone can tolerate the summer heat. Acclimatization may take one to two weeks in a healthy person.

Protect yourself when outdoors in the heat by following these tips:

- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing.
- Stay hydrated and take breaks in the shade.
- Avoid overexertion, heavy activity and direct sunlight.

The symptoms of heat illness may vary between individuals and can develop very rapidly. Common signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke include:

- feeling faint/dizzy
- confusion
- weakness or fatigue
- muscle cramps
- nausea

RIP CURRENT SAFETY

Rip currents are narrow, powerful currents of water that flow away from the shore and can happen anywhere that waves occur, even on lakes. Rip currents are always present but become stronger based on the wave, tide, and beach features.

A rip current forms when waves travel; some break along the shoreline stronger than others, creating a circulation with water flowing out to sea. The higher the surf, the more dangerous the rip current conditions can be in a given area. Rip currents move at roughly 1-2 ft/sec (~0.6 - 1.4 mph) and have been observed up to 8 ft/sec (5.5 mph), faster than most swimmers, including Olympic swimmers.

Identifying a rip current can be hard when standing on the beach. There are some clues to look for when trying to spot a rip current:

- A narrow gap of deeper and darker water that seems calm.
- Fewer breaking waves.
- Sand-colored water extends beyond the surf zone.
- Debris, foam or seaweed.
- Significant water movement.

While this list contains some ways to identify them, rip currents can form without any visible signs. To be safe, swim at beaches patrolled by lifeguards and never swim alone. Pay attention to any signs or the beach warning flags posted near access points. These flags provide information on conditions, and the absence of flags does not assure low-hazard conditions. When red or double red flags are posted, some states will fine you for entering the water.

And don’t go out in the water if you think there may be a rip current.

If you get caught in a rip current:

- Try to remain calm to conserve energy.
- Don’t fight the current. Think of it like a treadmill you can’t turn off. You want to

step to the side of it.

- Swim across the current in a direction following the shoreline. Once out of the current, swim back towards shore.
- If you can’t escape the current, try to float or calmly tread water. Rip currents typically weaken beyond where the waves are breaking. When the current weakens, swim down the beach, then head back to shore.

- If you cannot reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.

If you see someone caught in a rip current:

- Get help from a lifeguard. If none is available, have someone call 9-1-1.
- Throw the victim something that floats — a lifejacket, cooler or pool noodle.
- Yell instructions or direct them on how to escape.
- Never enter the water yourself to help someone without a flotation device. You could become a victim yourself.

WEATHER READY

Check the current and forecasted weather conditions and any severe weather watches and warnings before you head outdoors by visiting your local National Weather Service Office at www.weather.gov.

If you plan to be out on the water, you can check the marine forecasts, for lakes, near offshore and offshore conditions at www.weather.gov/marine.

Make sure to have a NOAA Weather Radio or a VHF transceiver with a built-in NOAA Weather Radio to keep updated on changing weather conditions.

The South Carolina State Climatology Office issues weekly weather outlooks and will send more frequent information when a significant weather event, such as a hurricane, threatens South Carolina.

Scan the QR Code to sign up for the weekly weather outlooks from the South Carolina State Climatology Office.

Remember to stay weather aware while enjoying the outdoors.

