



Nags Head Ocean Rescue

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To: Andy Garman, Town Manager
From: Chad Motz, Ocean Rescue Captain
Date: January 31, 2024
Re: Updating Warning Flag System

The Ocean Rescue Division is seeking the board's approval for an updated beach warning flag system. The purpose of updating the system is to align with National and International standards established in 2004. The updated system would also mirror messaging from Dare County Emergency Management's award-winning safety campaign "Love the Beach, Respect the Ocean", where daily beach, surf and rip current conditions are posted based on the National Weather Service rip current forecast.

Our overall goal is to provide better safety education, more consistent messaging, and potentially reduce the number of "Ocean Closed" days.

Beach Warning Flags
Banderas de Advertencia en la playa

 **Water Closed to Public**
Entry into the Atlantic Ocean is unlawful.

 **High Hazard**
High Surf and/or Currents
All swimmers are discouraged from entering the water.

 **Medium Hazard**
Moderate Surf and/or Currents
Weak swimmers are discouraged from entering the water.

 For up to date information follow the link in the QR code

Absence of Flags Does Not Assure Safe Waters



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In conjunction with the new flag system, we are requesting modifications to the language in our Town Code. Changes are highlighted in Yellow.

Sec. 8-2. Swimming; prohibited during dangerous conditions.

(a) It is recognized that during certain periods of time, as a result of a combination of environmental conditions, dangerous riptides and undercurrents occur in the ocean surf making ocean conditions unsafe for swimmers. The town manager **or their designee** is authorized, **when he to** make a determination that conditions are unsafe for swimmers in the Atlantic Ocean, to prohibit all swimming in the Atlantic Ocean until such time as ~~he shall determine~~ **that** the unsafe conditions have abated. During such periods in which swimming is prohibited and after **reasonable** notice is given to the public, **by announcement on the local radio station, and by to include** the posting of signs on **lifeguard stands and "Double Red Flags"** at the public accesses to the Atlantic Ocean, swimming in the Atlantic Ocean shall be unlawful. The town manager **or their designee** shall make the determination of whether or not ocean conditions are safe based upon ~~his observations~~ of the effects of winds, tides, storm conditions and other environmental conditions affecting the surf in the Atlantic Ocean. ~~He~~ **The town manager** shall also take into consideration weather reports of existing storms in the Atlantic Ocean and the proximity of those storms to the beaches of the town, and the effect thereof.

USLA POSITION STATEMENT ON BEACH WARNING FLAGS

For decades, lifeguard agencies in the U.S. and around the world have employed flags to notify swimmers of conditions, to warn of hazards, to identify safer areas for swimming, and to notify beach users about regulated areas. To help ensure global consistency, in 2004 the International Life Saving Federation developed international guidelines for warning flags.

These guidelines have been adopted, in part, by the International Standards Organization and are endorsed by the United States Lifesaving Association. By consistently following these warning flag guidelines, lifeguard agencies can help ensure a universal understanding of their meaning and thus improve their effectiveness.

These flags are only approved for use on beaches where lifeguards trained to USLA standards are on duty. Flags are not an acceptable substitute for properly trained and equipped rescuers, but rather a tool for their use.

To be fully effective, the use of warning flags to notify the public of current hazard levels should be consistent, based on objective, measurable criteria that can be logged and tracked, and then changed as conditions change. They should be accompanied by good public education efforts to explain the meaning of the flags flown.



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Ocean conditions vary throughout the U.S. Conditions that may be considered relatively mild in some places may be seen as a significant safety threat in others. Therefore, in each area where warning flags are employed, the USLA recommends that specific local criteria be developed and that the public be clearly notified of those criteria.

In some areas of the U.S., green flags are flown to indicate calm or mild conditions. The International Life Saving Federation (ILS) considered this carefully and decided not to adopt the green flag. The primary reason is the fact that there is always a potential hazard present and the view that it is best to notify people when conditions are unusually challenging, rather than suggesting that they are ever completely safe.

Flag Definitions

The following are specific definitions for each of the flags.

- **Yellow** – Medium hazard. Moderate surf and/or currents are present. Weak swimmers are discouraged from entering the water. For others, enhanced care and caution should be exercised.
- **Red** – High hazard. Rough conditions such as strong surf and/or currents are present. All swimmers are discouraged from entering the water. Those entering the water should take great care.
- **Double red** – Water is closed to public use.