

Coast Guard urges beach safety during King Tides

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All beachgoers in the Pacific Northwest are encouraged to exercise heightened caution for sneaker waves during the upcoming King Tides this weekend and for the remainder of the winter.

The Coast Guard and National Weather Service are urging the public who visit coastal beaches during King Tides to be on alert for dangerous surf and potentially fatal sneaker waves.

Sneaker waves are disproportionately large waves which surge unexpectedly up the beach without warning. They are characterized by insignificant heights within period groups of small waves, giving the appearance of light sea conditions. The sudden rush of water will immerse the dry shore and send large logs rolling, becoming dangerous projectiles. Other hazards include being swept out to sea and immersion into cold water. Sneaker waves are the deadliest natural hazard on the West Coast; it is of the utmost importance to practice sound judgement prior to and while patronizing coastal beaches.

The following measures should be taken by beachgoers:

- Review notifications put out by the National Weather Service (NWS), including the Seattle, Portland, and Medford offices, who collectively cover the Pacific Northwest coastline and issue Beach Hazard Statements.
- Be aware, sneaker waves can occur outside of times outlined by the NWS.
- Familiarize yourself with the area: where all beach exits are and the location of any logs or debris.
- Remain further away from the waterline than you think is necessary, sneaker waves can run up by at least one half-length of a football field.
- Refrain from walking near or playing on any logs onshore, which can become projectiles from powerful waves.
- Remain vigilant for the duration of your visit.
- Never turn your back on the ocean.

Winter months in the Pacific Northwest are particularly dangerous for those on shore and at sea as well. The Coast Guard strongly urges all mariners to regularly check weather forecasts and monitor bar closures or restrictions. Coastal bar observations can be found at the NWS ‘All Bars’ report.

For more information on sneaker waves please see the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration’s website. Beach Hazard Statements with pertinent warnings can be found at the NWS Portland or Medford’s homepages, in addition to further weather safety there and at NWS Seattle’s homepage.