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New beach safety information

Great Lakes beach app adds hazard alerts

Ann Arbor, Mich. – As swimming season begins in the Great Lakes, the Great Lakes Commission has released new tools to ensure people’s time spent at the beach, hitting the waves and cruising the waters, is safe and fun.

To help protect swimmers from dangerous currents, the Great Lakes *myBeachCast* smartphone application (app) now features beach hazard statements issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). To download *myBeachCast*, go to beachcast.glin.net.

Beach hazard statements are issued for Great Lakes beaches by the NOAA National Weather Service (NWS) when the potential for strong and dangerous rip currents and waves is medium or high. The currents generally do not pull a person under the water, but can pull a swimmer away from the shore.

“Dangerous currents occur throughout the Great Lakes and we want to make people aware so they can stay safe,” says Tim Eder, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission. “Through the use of new mobile technologies, we now have an added way to alert people to dangerous conditions and hopefully save lives.”

Drownings in the Great Lakes are on the rise, according to the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project. Since 2010, 274 people have drowned in Great Lakes waters (74 in 2010; 87 in 2011; and 113 in 2012). So far in 2013, 12 people have reportedly lost their lives in drowning accidents. NWS incident reports indicate that on Lake Michigan alone, there have been more than 300 current-related incidents since 2002 and over 60 percent of the rescue attempts have occurred near piers and other permanent structures where dangerous currents are often present. Lake Michigan typically sees a higher number of incidents due to its popularity and favorable orientation to onshore winds, which can lead to rip current development.

(more)



Great Lakes Commission

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Swimmers should look for green, yellow and red flags at beaches, which indicate the presence of dangerous currents. In addition, beachgoers can follow these tips to stay safe:

- Ask children to wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket
- In an emergency, call 911 and communicate your exact location
- Bring something that floats if going in the water
- If caught in a dangerous current, float (don't panic), alert someone that you're in trouble by shouting or waving your arms, and then try to swim out of the current to shore
- Avoid swimming near piers, breakwalls and other structures
- If there are high winds or waves, stay on shore. When in doubt, don't go out!

To get the word out, the Great Lakes Commission, in cooperation with regional partners, has also developed a beach safety card that features free applications and safety tips to promote swimming safety. The cards will be available at welcome centers, parks and beaches throughout Michigan and neighboring states this summer. Other partners on the effort include LimnoTech, WeatherFlow and Michigan Sea Grant.

The Great Lakes Commission, in partnership with the Great Lakes states, LimnoTech and the Great Lakes Observing System, has developed *myBeachCast* to provide convenient, public access to swim advisories and other environmental conditions information for more than 1,800 beaches in the Great Lakes region. Funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the *myBeachCast* app also features real-time and forecasted weather and lake conditions (e.g., water temperature, wave heights, wind speed/direction) and nearshore marine forecasts from NOAA.

For more information, visit beachcast.glin.net or www.dangerouscurrents.org.

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Kenneth G. Johnson, water division administrator at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors' appointees, state legislators, and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a "Declaration of Partnership." The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at www.glc.org.