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News Release

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"Break the Grip of the Rip"

Rip Current Awareness Campaign During Beach Safety Awareness Week

With water temperatures well above normal for this time of year, and perhaps one of the sunniest May's on recent record, people are flocking to beaches early this season. Now is the perfect time to educate beach-goers about ocean safety and rip currents.

WHAT: Press conference, unveiling of new National Rip Current Safety Campaign. Event marks the start of 2004 Beach Safety Week.

WHEN: Monday, May 24, 2004, 7 a.m.- 8 a.m., local San Diego time. Kickoff event in Wrightsville Beach, NC. Conference will be broadcast live via satellite. Also 14 minutes of B-Roll will be fed at 6:40 a.m. and at 8:05 a.m., San Diego time. For satellite uplink coordinates and more information visit:

<http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/advisories/adv107.html>.

WHO: Chris Brewster, president of the United States Lifesaving Association and former chief of the City of San Diego Lifeguard Service (E. brewster@lifesaver1.com; T. 858-581-1221); Retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Sandee LaMotte, widow of CNN correspondent and bureau chief Larry LaMotte who drowned while trying to rescue 11-year-old son.

WHAT'S COOL: A new standardized national rip current sign will be unveiled, and also a brochure will be made available. The National Weather Service will also unveil a new rip current information Website. Note also: NWS Surf Forecasts now include "rip current outlooks." For more information and to see new rip current sign and brochure, visit <http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/>.

BACKGROUND:

At least 100 people die each year from rip currents. It is estimated that about 80 percent of all lifeguard rescues at surfing beaches are the result of swimmers becoming trapped in rip currents. With summer approaching, NOAA and the US Lifesaving Association are launching a public awareness campaign about the dangers of rip currents and how to avoid their potentially deadly grasp.

LOCAL RIP CURRENT EXPERT:

Robert Guza, professor at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, surf-zone circulation specialist. For comments on rip current dynamics in San Diego area, T. 858-534-0585.

SAFETY TIPS:

Know that bigger waves means the potential for stronger rips. If you are not a strong swimmer, avoid swimming on days when the surf is pounding.

If you find yourself in a rip, don't panic. Science experiments show that rip currents end at the edge of the surf zone. You won't be swept to China, so relax.

Swim at beaches with lifeguards on duty.

California Sea Grant is a statewide, multi-university program of marine research, extension services, and education activities administered by the University of California. It is the largest of 30 Sea Grant programs sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce.

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