



Best Practices for Beach Closures

Shore communities are rightfully proud of their beaches and are also proud of their life guard / beach patrol services. But as summer dwindles, so too do the number of available lifeguards to protect the beaches of a town. Many life guards are college students who leave in August to return to classes. Others are school teachers who also must leave before Labor Day to ready their classes. This leaves Beach Patrol and municipal leaders with questions on how to best respond to fewer and eventually no lifeguard protection on beaches.

Generally, the best risk control practice is to either fully guard the beach or not to guard the beach at all. It should be clear to the beach-goer that the beach is either protected or not protected.

The Safety Director offers the following best practices to control swimming on unprotected beaches.

- Warning signs should be clearly posted at accesses to closed beaches. The Safety Director recommends “Beach is Unprotected. No Swimming Permitted.” Signs must be in English. Other languages are optional.

If certain beaches will still be protected by lifeguards, such as in late August or even into early September, it is a good practice to also direct the user to which beaches are protected.

- If a beach is closed or unprotected, lifeguards should not be present or visible. This can give the impression the beach is protected. Similarly, uniformed police specifically dedicated to patrolling the beach on foot or in vehicles in lieu of lifeguards is not recommended. Police officers on routine patrol should be encouraged to enforce bathing regulations.

If stand-by rescue crews are available, they too should be quartered out of sight and their equipment accessible but invisible to the public.

- Once a schedule for closing beaches is established, the municipality should announce that schedule through every media outlet available including press releases, social media, municipal webpages, and signage. Having pre-scripted messages that can be used each year will facilitate this process.
- All appropriate municipal personnel should be aware of the beach closure schedule, including emergency service personnel, the municipal clerk, chief administrative officer, and elected officials. A consistent message is the goal.

Whether the town closes their beaches after Labor Day weekend or continues to provide limited lifeguard protection into early September, following these best practices avoids confusion to residents and visitors to our beaches at the end of summer. Better information provides better safety to everyone.