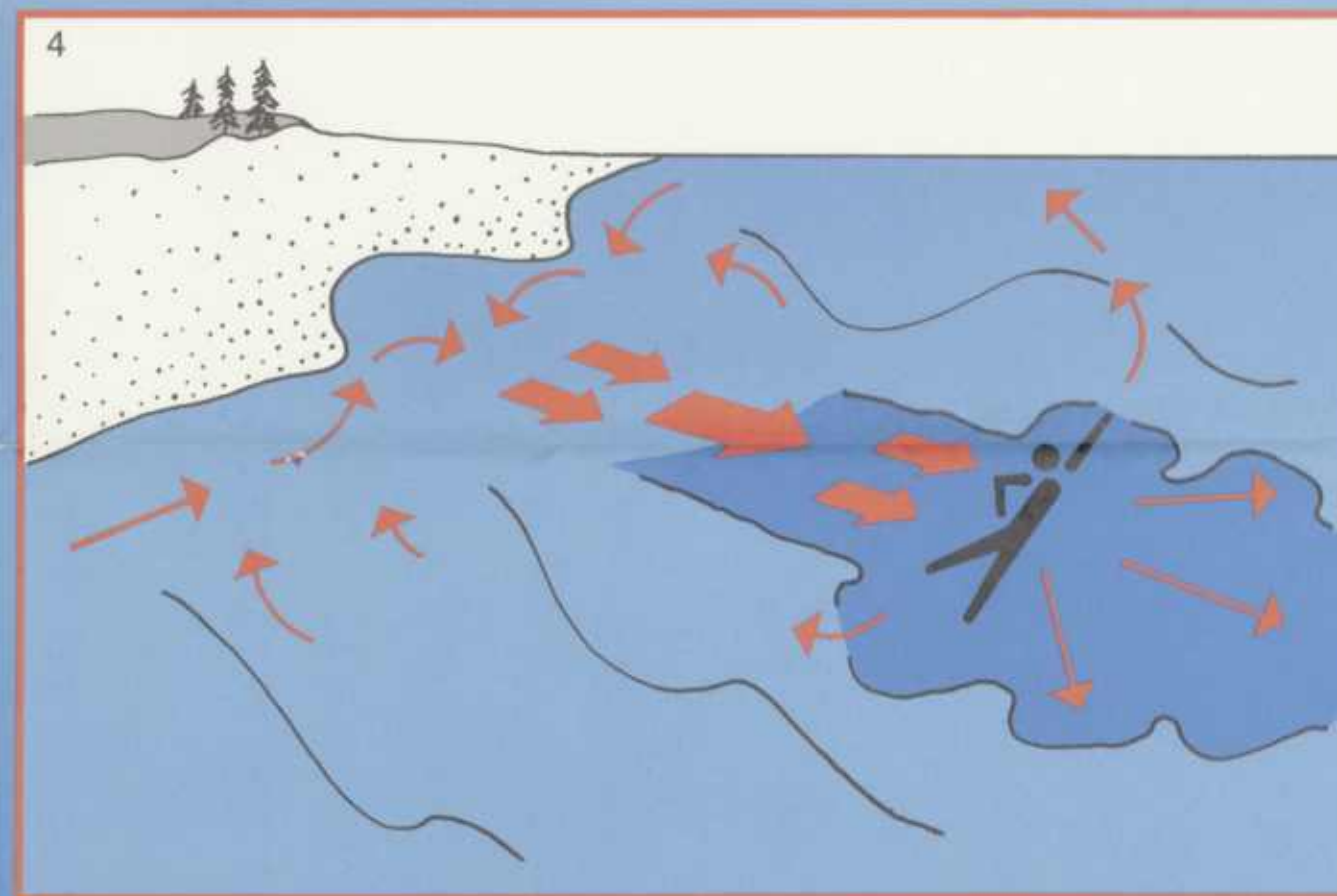
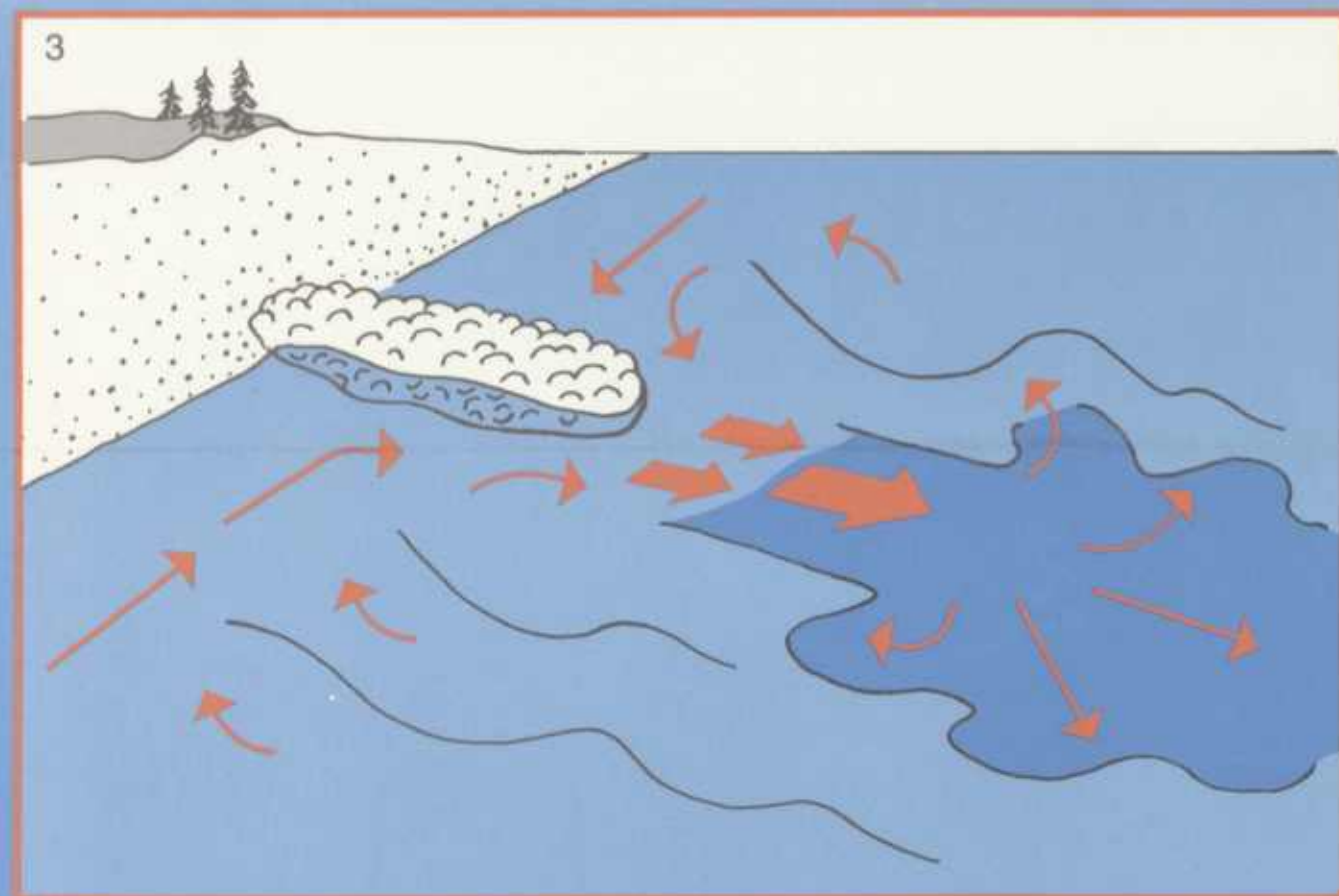
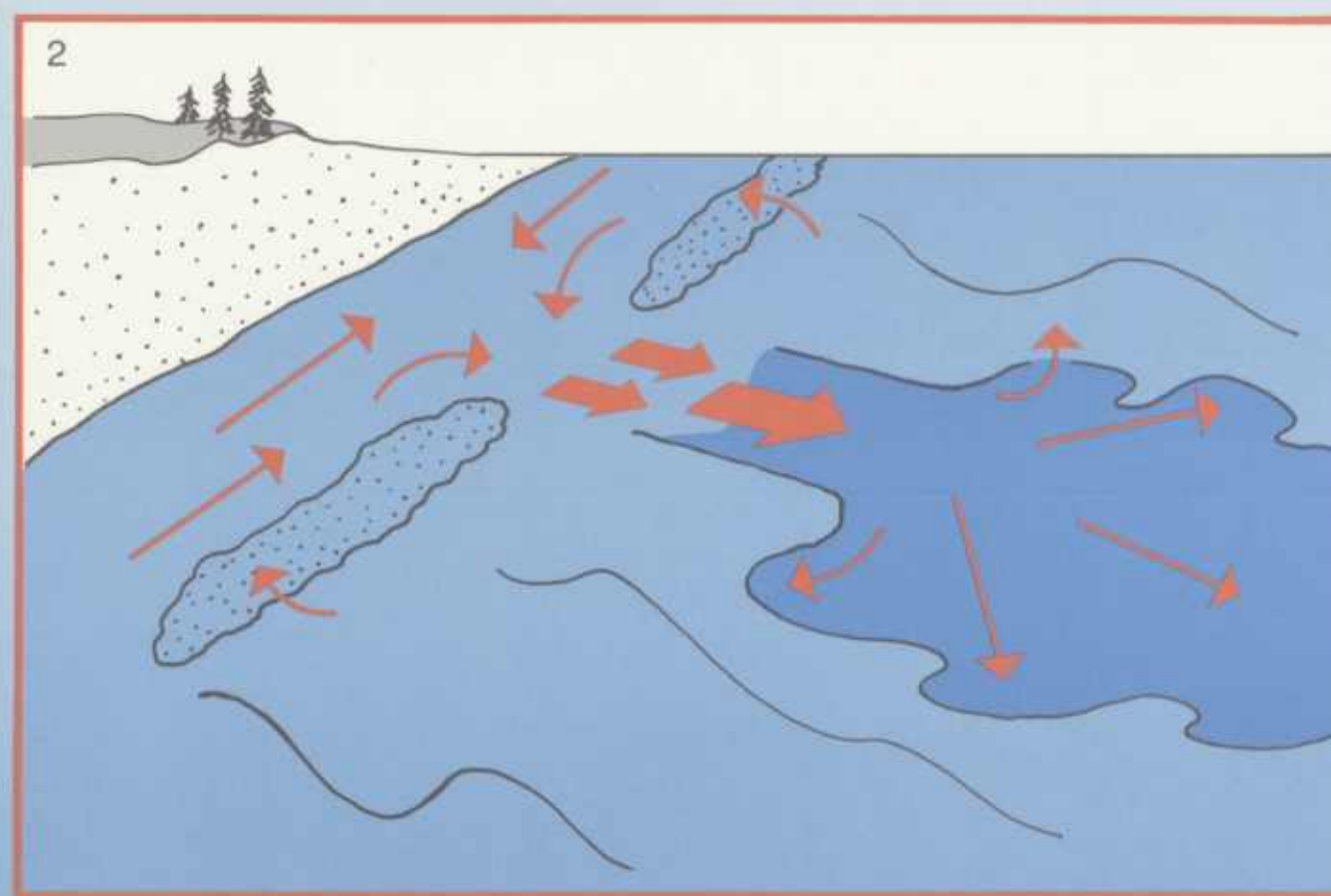


# RIP CURRENTS



## **Rip currents** can be killers.

Sometimes misnamed *undertows*, they may be strong enough to pull even experienced swimmers away from shore. However, knowing how to avoid or to cope with them can prevent panic and drowning.

**Causes:** Rip currents are formed when water moves shoreward in the surf zone and then rushes, with intense energy, back out to sea in a narrow path. This often happens (see Figs. 1, 2, 3 above) when: 1) longshore currents moving in opposite directions meet, usually in a bay; 2) there is a break in an offshore sandbar; 3) the longshore current is diverted by a jetty, groin, or other obstruction.

Rip currents are seldom wider than 10 yards and rarely extend farther than 100 yards offshore. However, they have been known to reach 30 yards in width and extend as far as 1,000 yards offshore. They can travel at speeds of up to 4 feet per second. They may be semipermanent features or last only a few hours, depending on wind, waves, and tide.

**Signs:** Before entering the ocean, look carefully for telltale signs of rip currents:

- ▶ A change in water color from surrounding water (either murkier from sediments or greener from depth—one of the most common signs)
- ▶ An agitated surface, with white caps extending beyond the breaker zone
- ▶ A gap in advancing breakers, where the rip current is forcing its way seaward
- ▶ A floating object moving steadily seaward

**What to Do:** If you do get caught in a rip current (see Fig. 4),

- ▶ **Don't panic.** Hysteria wastes energy and keeps you from thinking clearly.
- ▶ **Don't try to swim against the current.**
- ▶ **Swim parallel to shore until you get out of the current** since it will probably not be more than 30 feet wide.
- ▶ If you can't break out of the current, **float calmly out with it** until it subsides, usually just beyond the breaker zone. **Then swim diagonally to shore.**

Enjoy the ocean, but keep alert for the conditions described above.



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