RIP CURRENT RELATED DROWNING DEATHS AND RESCUES IN AUSTRALIA 2004–2011

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**Background** Rip currents are narrow, strong currents that move seaward through the surf zone. Rip currents are the number one drowning hazard on surf beaches globally. A comprehensive review of rip current related drowning and rescue has not been reported to date.

**Aims** To describe rip current related drowning deaths and rescues in Australia from 2004 to 2011.

**Methods** A retrospective search was undertaken for fatal and non-fatal rip related drowning incidents in Australia from the National Coroner’s Information System (NCIS), SurfGuard Incident Reporting Database (IRD), and Media Monitors, between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2011.

**Results** There were 629 fatal coastal drowning deaths recorded and rip currents were a factor in 145 fatalities (22.9%), an average of 21 per year. There were a total of 1246 ‘major rescues’, lifesavers reported the involvement of rip currents in 602 rescues (48.3%), an average of 86 per year.

**Significance** Using similar data sets from life saving organisations in the USA, UK, and NZ an international range of 48.3%-57.9% of all rescues are rip related, which is comparable to Australia. Rip related events are common though preventable. Priority strategies for rip related drowning prevention include educating beachgoers to: swim between the flags; identify rip currents; and appropriate responses if caught in a rip. Interventions should target young males in particular, as they are overrepresented in rip related drowning and rescue incidents.