



# Rip current Information Project

*“Endeavouring to create understanding of Great Lakes rip currents and ending rip current related drowning.”*

**Delegation to County of Elgin Council**

**Presented by Nathan MacIntyre**

**Date: June 24, 2025 | Time: 9:00 AM**

**Topic: The Rip Current Information Project**

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## INTRODUCTION

Good evening, Honourable Councillors.

Thank you for receiving my delegation this evening.

My name is Nathan MacIntyre and I am here to raise awareness of a relatively unknown phenomenon called Rip Currents. I would like to give you a little background about myself to get going.

I am a seasoned water safety professional with over 25 years of experience in aquatic rescue and marine operations. For 18 seasons, I served as a lifeguard on the Main Beach in Port Stanley, Ontario, where I was instrumental in developing the modern-day operational standards of the **Central Elgin Beach Rescue Service**. As a **National Lifeguard** certified in **waterfront**, I have personally responded to hundreds of nearshore and offshore rescues in Port Stanley.

I built a successful **marine-rescue program** for **CEBRS**, responding to an average of 25-30 offshore vessel and medical emergencies annually. I expanded local outreach by developing water safety presentations in public schools and contributing to community-wide events such as *The Children's Water Safety Festival*. My commitment led to the full integration of the Beach Rescue Service into the Municipality's **Fire Rescue Services Department**, elevating aquatic safety within emergency response systems, in Port Stanley. It is truly special, a one-of-a-kind



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program in Ontario and we should all be proud of our Lifeguards and Firefighters for their diligent service.

My pursuit of Marine-knowledge has taken me around the world—from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji to the Caribbean, Mexico, and the United States, including correspondence with Hawaiian Lifeguards; studying best practices from leading surf lifesaving organizations.

In 1998, a close friend Jeff Brasser (*member of this community*) lost his life to a fatal-drowning in Port Stanley just 4 days before his 17th birthday. Myself, including Jeff’s brother and many fellow peers witnessed this tragedy as we were enjoying the beach on our last day of high school. This incident ignited a lifelong mission to prevent further tragedies through awareness, training, and scientific understanding.

Through years of observation and collaboration with scientists like Dr. Chris Houser, Coastal Geomorphologist, Dean of Faculty of Science, Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Waterloo, I have come to understand that this little-known phenomenon is a highly-efficient, naturally engineered, nearshore mechanism of drowning.

I continue contributing data-collection to NOAA’s (*National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration*) National Rip Current Database with Meteorologist Megan Dodson. Megan, myself, along with colleagues from the University of Michigan and other water-rescue practitioners co-founded the **Great Lakes Water Safety Consortium**. I currently serve as an **Ontario Regional Co-Representative** and sit on the **Lifeguarding** and **Data Metrics** committees. I also sit on the Board of the **Elgin County Drowning Prevention Coalition**, a grassroots group, advocating for both fatal and non-fatal drowning prevention.

My qualifications span beyond lifesaving:

- Certified PADI SCUBA diver (*Open Water, Advanced Open Water, Rescue Diver, and Cave and Cavern*)
- Sea Survival and Marine Firefighting certifications (*STCW-95*)
- Commercial Captain Licence (*Coastal Navigation, 200 GT*) with Sailing Endorsement
  - Logged 1000’s of nautical miles across the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico
- Proud member of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary – Central Arctic Region (*currently inactive*)
- Worked as a Marine ecologist in Garrafon Eco Park, Xcaret and Xel-ha, (*Mayan Riviera, Mexico*) creating a restoration project for a portion of the Mesoamerican Barrier reef system as well as creating an eco-experience (*Delphinus Trek*) with East Coast Bottlenose Dolphins.



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- I am a Registered Massage Therapist and Regulated Healthcare Professional (*Ontario*)
- Hold multiple advanced medical certifications

On the heels of another tragic rip current-related fatality last year (2024) in Port Stanley, I have founded the **Rip Current Information Project (RIP)**—a registered not-for-profit dedicated to raising awareness, correcting misinformation, and ultimately **saving lives** on the Great Lakes.

For far too long, there has been misinformation regarding Great Lakes *undertow*. Rip Currents are a very real phenomena that can occur on any beach where waves are breaking.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

What are Rip Currents?

**Definition:** *“Rip currents are powerful, channeled currents of water flowing away from shore. They typically extend from the shoreline, through the surf zone, and past the line of breaking waves. Rip currents can occur at any beach with breaking waves, including the Great Lakes.”*  
NOAA

**Summer Locknick** - Department of Earth and Environmental Science, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Windsor

Performed a research study titled: **“Beach User Perceptions of the Rip Current Hazard on the Great Lakes” (2017)**

**Findings:** *“Preliminary evidence suggests that the public has limited knowledge of rip currents, and are therefore not making informed decisions, which puts them at risk every time they go to the beach.”*

## LOCAL RELEVANCE

This is a local issue here on the shores of our Great Lakes. It is our collective issue.

- NOAA reports that **over 80% of surf rescues** are due to rip currents.
- **Dr. Chris Houser** notes an average of **50 surf-related drownings annually** in the Great Lakes region, many attributed to rip currents.
- The University of Windsor reports that the **economic burden** of drowning fatalities in Ontario alone exceeds **\$380 million annually**—and many of our public beaches lack lifeguards, active monitoring or a standard delivery of information, across Ontario.

In 2024, we lost yet another life to a rip current in Port Stanley. It's time to talk about this.



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This year 2025, I will be targeting Port Stanley, Port Burwell and all the surrounding communities with Rip Current messaging.

## CAMPAIGN DETAILS

To meet this challenge, I have founded the **Rip Current Information Project (RIP)**—a community-driven, registered non-profit focused on education, awareness, and prevention.

To date, the campaign has:

- Created a recognizable symbol for rip current awareness
- Built an educational website
- Developed public presentations for schools, emergency services, and governments
- Produced promotional materials including flyers, brochures, and a children’s book (*currently in development*)
- Actively engaged with media, MPs, and MPPs, Premier of Ontario, Ministry of Education, Provincial Parks, Conservation Areas, etc
- Initiated conversations with the Lifesaving Society of Canada to integrate this messaging into public school curriculum via “Swim-to-survive” programs in Grades 3 and 7.

The reception so far has been overwhelmingly positive. But RIP is just getting started—and I believe County of Elgin can play a pivotal role in helping to share the message.

## RIP IS ASKING

Tonight, I am asking for your **support**.

This could include:

- Promoting and offering **space for community presentations**, such as *Understanding Rip Currents*.
- Assisting with **outreach via municipal channels**—Tourism, and public communications, displaying brochures/information/messaging etc.
- Endorsing and elevating this initiative as part of your broader commitment to public safety
- Providing financial support to facilitate the operational activities of RIP.

Your voice and partnership can help bring this life-saving message to families across the region.



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## BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

By supporting the Rip Current Information Project, Elgin County stands to gain:

- **Fewer injuries and lives saved**
- **An enhanced reputation** for public safety and proactive leadership
- **Stronger community engagement**, particularly among youth, families, Mennonite community.
- **Alignment with a growing provincial movement** around drowning prevention.

Simply put—your support could help save lives this summer.

## CALL TO ACTION

In closing, I invite the County of Elgin to assist *Rip Current Information Project* in fostering an informed and water-smart culture.

Let's take the lead in ensuring every swimmer, family member, friend, resident and visitor alike can enjoy the beaches safely and confidently. Empowering Governments, emergency responders and the public with evidence-based knowledge to help themselves and others stay safe while enjoying the Great Lakes.

I am eager to collaborate on ways we can bring rip current education to every corner of this community.

Thank you again for your time, your service to the community and your consideration.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.