

# Department of Public Safety

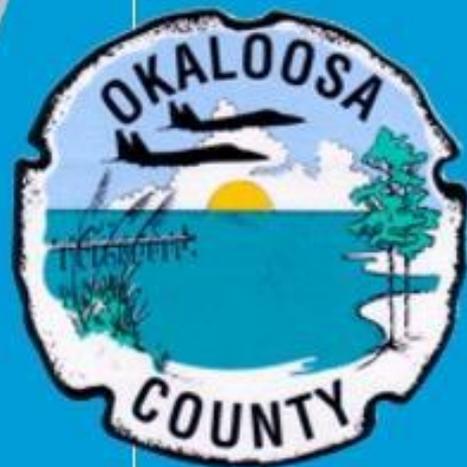
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PUBLIC SAFETY BRIEF AND SPRING  
BREAK PREPAREDNESS 2026



# Public Safety

- EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
  - EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES- ALL PRE-HOSPITAL CARE TO INCLUDE TACTICAL MEDICS AND COMMUNITY PARAMEDICINE
  - BEACH SAFETY- LIFEGUARDS OKALOOSA ISLAND
  - PARK RANGER PROGRAM
  - DORCAS FIRE DEPARTMENT
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- COUNTER-TERRORISM
  - ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING
  - ANIMAL CONTROL
  - *ALL OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED*



# Public Safety

TODAY'S TOPICS- 30 MINUTES OF:

- BEACH SAFETY AND PARK RANGERS
  - SPRING BREAK READINESS
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# Public Safety

## BEACH SAFETY



Prevent the incidence of death and injury in the aquatic and beach environment as efficiently and effectively as possible through public education, maintenance of high professional and technical standards, and the maintenance of a constant state of readiness year-round.



# Okaloosa Island Beach Safety

(Program Overview)

## **OKALOOSA ISLAND- COUNTY / DESTIN BEACHES- DESTIN FD (CONTRACT)**

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- **OKALOOSA ISLAND- COUNTY OPERATED, FUNDED BY TDD 10% PS ALLOCATION**
- **STAFFING:** F/T: 1 Chief, 1 Captain, 3 Lieutenants, P/T: 23 Seasonal Guards for 238 days
- **TRAINING:** 48 hr. USLA Open Water Rescue Cert, 48 hr. First Responder Cert, AHA CPR/AED for the healthcare provider, 8 hr. Vehicle Ops, Radio Comms w/ NEW P25 Inter-operable Radio System, Beach Familiarization
- **WINTER OPERATIONS:** Post-Labor Day Weekend to 2<sup>ND</sup> Weekend in March: F/T only
- **SPRING OPERATIONS:** 2<sup>ND</sup> week in March-Memorial Day Weekend, 9A-6P
- 5 Guards week-days, 7-9 Guards weekends- scalable *depending on beach census*
- **SUMMER OPERATIONS:** Memorial Day Weekend-Labor Day Weekend, 9A-6P Patrol and response 6P-8P
- 7-9 Guards weekdays, 9-11 Guards weekends depending on beach census
- Overlapping shifts 3 Guards 9A-5P, 4 Guards 10A-6P, 2 Guards 12P-8P w/closing Lt



# Beach Safety

(Program Overview & Accomplishments)

- 3.5 miles of guarded beach with 5 towers off-peak, 7-9 towers on-peak. Weekly beach census of 10-15K (Winter), 80K (March), peak 250K (July). Annual census almost 2M!
- 2 response Trucks (Ranger and Colorado), 8 ATVs (Honda Rancher 400) 2 Jet skis (Yamaha 1800s)
- Ocean West Tower Operator for Command and Control - 100% visibility of operating area
- Over 900,000 documented non-rescue preventative actions including flag system explanation, rip current safety, Ordinance education and warnings, dangerous marine life
- 37 rip current and heavy surf rescues with ZERO DROWNINGS on County-guarded beaches (+12%)
- 86 reports of lost children on the beach; ALL were found and returned to their families (+19%)
- 203 medical calls (+30%)



# Beach Safety

(Supplemental Engagements)

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- Swift-water Rescue Team for Flood, Hurricanes, Severe Weather
- “Buddy on the Beach” prevention program reached over 5,000 visiting youth
- Beach Wheelchair program for disabled guests; average 400 deliveries annually
- Public education and Junior Lifeguard program with over 50 participants
- Safety presentations to civic groups, church groups, military organizations and others
- Posters, information cards and pamphlets, and videos are printed and distributed to local schools and universities during safety presentations conducted by senior lifeguard staff members.
- “Know Before You Go” Campaign- Rip Current and Flag System Identification



# Beach Safety

## (Budget Impacts)

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- We do all that for under \$850K with personnel costs encumbering 57% of the budget
- No additional General Fund or TDD-supported staff positions requested at this time
- Recommended budget annually approved by Tourist Development Department
- Increasing educational and preventative contacts to beach patrons are decreasing rescues
- Increased hourly pay for seasonal lifeguards to fully staff all 23 positions resulted in nominal increases for FT Staff to preserve equity- competition is fierce- explain.
- Text Beach to 44144 for current flag conditions has been a very successful campaign to the point of considering “throttling” at certain times.



# Destin Beach Safety

(Program Overview)

## OKALOOSA ISLAND- COUNTY / DESTIN BEACHES- DESTIN FD (CONTRACT)

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- **DESTIN BEACHES- DESTIN FD OPERATED, FUNDED BY TDD 10% PS ALLOCATION**
- **STAFFING:** F/T: 1 Batt. Chief (Vacant), 2 Lieutenants, 2 “Officers”, P/T: 83 Seasonal Guards “during season”
- **TRAINING:** USLA Recognized Agency
- **WINTER OPERATIONS:** Post-Labor Day Weekend to 2<sup>ND</sup> Weekend in March: F/T only
- **SEASON OPERATIONS:** The Division operated ten four-wheel drive rescue vehicles, six side-by-side rescue vehicles, four rescue-equipped personal watercraft, four enclosed towers, and 19 chairs during the season. 3 Chairs dedicated to Henderson Beach



# Beach Safety

(Program Overview & Accomplishments)

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- miles of guarded beach (Noriego Point to County Line including Henderson Beach) with varying towers off-peak, 4 towers and 12 chairs on-peak. Annual census almost 2M
- 4, 4WD response Trucks, 6 side-by-sides, 4 watercraft
- Over 231,000 documented non-rescue preventative actions, 640 watercraft infractions, 108 major medical responses, 640 minor aid responses
- 137 rescues with 5 DROWNINGS on Destin beaches- 3 guarded, 2 jetties after-hours
- 165 reports of lost/missing people on the beach
- Budget: 1.35M- TDD Funded with 86% of the total budget allocated toward personnel \*



# Beach Safety

(Beach Flag Warning System Decoded)



Text "BEACH" to 44144 for water conditions updates

### FLAG WARNING SYSTEM

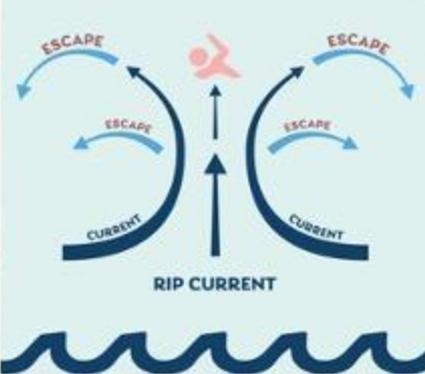
-  **Water closed**  
Water activity is prohibited
-  **High hazard**  
Waves steep or too close
-  **Moderate surf/currents**
-  **Calm conditions**
-  **Dangerous marine life**

Absence of flags does not assure safe waters.  
Swim at your own risk.

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## RIP CURRENT

A rip current is a powerful channel of water flowing away from shore.



ESCAPE

ESCAPE

ESCAPE

ESCAPE

CURRENT

CURRENT

RIP CURRENT



# Beach Safety

(Beach Flag Warning System Decoded)

- Governed by F.S.S. 380.276 and locally codified by County Ordinance 16-43

**Florida Statute 380.276 highlights:**

- Warning Flag System shall be a *unified* System throughout the state- directed and coordinated by DEP through the Florida Coastal Management Program. Unless additional safety and warning devices are authorized, only the flags developed by the program shall be authorized. Such program shall provide:
  - (a) For posted notification of the meaning of each of the warning and safety flags at all designated public access points.
- (b) That uniform notification signs be posted in a conspicuous location and be clearly legible.
- (c) A standard size, shape, color, and definition for each warning and safety flag.



# Beach Safety

(Beach Flag Warning System Decoded)

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- Governed by F.S.S. 380.276 and locally codified by County Ordinance 16-43(i) and (j)

**Okaloosa County Ordinance 16-43 (i) highlights:**

- (i)(1) Only the Director of Public Safety or County Sheriff have the authority to declare the state of emergency necessary to post Double Red Flags prohibit entry into the water for all of OI and James Lee Park.
- (i)(2) Violation of the above is a misdemeanor under F.S.S. 843.02. Exemptions include persons surfing with a surfboard attached by a leash and/or persons using a stomach-contact bodyboard 42” or larger designed to carry one rider, wearing fins for steering with the board tethered at all times.



# Beach Safety

(Beach Flag Warning System Decoded)

- Governed by F.S.S. 380.276 and locally codified by County Ordinance 16-43(i) and (j)

**Okaloosa County Ordinance 16-43 (j) highlights:**

- (j)(1,2 and 3) a flag warning system shall be adopted by the BCC, accessways shall display a 24"x30" (or larger) sign informing the public of the beach flag system and hours of guarded beach. Beach vendors and contractors are encouraged to post same.
- (j)(4) Beach Lifeguards at County Beaches shall post appropriate flags 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday in March through 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in October. Warning flags will be raised when lifeguards are on duty and actively guarding and will be lowered when lifeguards leave the beach daily.



# Beach Safety

(Beach Flag Warning System Q & A)

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- **Why aren't flags up in winter or after hours?** Flags are flown when Lifeguards trained to USLA standards are on duty per USLA and local Ordinance.
- **Why doesn't Okaloosa fly green flags when Navarre and South Walton do?** In some areas of the U.S. green flags are flown to indicate calm or mild conditions. The International Life Saving Federation (ILS) considered this carefully and decided not to adopt the green flag. The primary reason is the fact that there is always a potential hazard present and the view that it is best to notify people when conditions are unusually challenging, rather than suggesting that they are ever completely safe.
- **Why do the flags change during the day and why are they sometimes different for other nearby locations at the same time?** The flags change as the water conditions change. Wind, tide, rip currents and off-shore conditions can quickly change the threat level in the surf. Sometimes these conditions arrive at different times in different places.



# Beach Safety

(Beach Flag Warning System Q & A)

- **What types of dangerous marine life results in flying purple flags?** This differs in every jurisdiction based on the type of marine life present. In Okaloosa County, we see:

Jellyfish: Cannonball, Moon, Sea Nettle, Pink Meanie, Portuguese Man-o-War

Cannonball



Moon



Sea Nettle



Pink Meanie



Man-o-War



- What about Sharks? Remember that yellow flag? They are *ALWAYS* there. Of course, if there's a feeding frenzy in a bait ball, temporary protective action will be taken for *ANY* predatory fish.



# Public Safety

## PARK RANGER PROGRAM



The Park Ranger Program provides year-round education, preventative actions and enforcement of county coastal parks and facilities to create positive impressions of the County while also promoting safe and equitable use of designated County park areas and facilities. It encourages compliance with County contracts, rules and regulations, city ordinances, and state statutes.



# Beach Park Ranger Program

(Program Overview)  
**COUNTY-OPERATED**

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- **STAFFING:** 1 Lead Park Ranger, 1 Park Ranger- same original hires going into year 4! This program has been amazingly impactful and now requires expansion to our other parks and boat ramps. An additional FTE Park Ranger is programmed into the personnel request for FY26.
  - Rangers operate one 4x4 Emergency Response Truck (Toyota Tacoma), one Side-by-Side and one ATV (Honda Rancher). An additional vehicle will be requested for the add-on Ranger.
  - Park Rangers provide educational and enforcement component of Okaloosa County beaches so locals and visitors can enjoy a safe beach environment
  - Education and prevention are cornerstones of this program to gain compliance with ordinances and regulate vendor activity



# Beach Park Ranger Program

## (Accomplishments)

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- Conducted over 86,000 documented Non-vendor citizen and visitor contacts for educational and preventative actions (+20%) Over 9K of those were Double Red Flag and Rip Current-related. Over 17K of those civilian contacts were Ordinance and information-related (+70%)
- Responded to 86 medical-related calls.
- Performed over 2,500 Vendor related contacts for permitting and ordinance actions (+25%). Many of these were related to beach umbrella/setup and Gulf encroachment violations or non-permitted vending.
- Dogs on the beach, smoking, glass, lost children, early or large tents, digging large holes and other general service contacts comprised the remainder.



# Beach Park Ranger Program

(Budget Impacts)

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- Budget: \$170K, add \$50K if additional Park Ranger is approved, **funded 100% from Beach Vendor Permitting Fees.**
- Why is that so important? No additional General Fund or TDD supported staff positions requested. Program funded through the General Fund and reimbursed through revenues collected from vendor permitting. AKA, I'm NOT asking you for money 😊
- Projection: If a Property Tax amendment passes this legislative cycle, General Fund Departments may suffer, but people won't save that money in the bank- money will be used for vacations/tourism/celebration. That sounds great- however; Essential Government Services will be suffering, legislation can be drafted which allows for TDD funding to expand to those areas- something to watch. In the coming years, a new President may reverse the tax amendment, changing the balance of funding for a yo-yo effect.



# Public Safety

## SPRING BREAK OPERATIONS



The Park Ranger Program provides year-round education, preventative actions and enforcement of county coastal parks and facilities to create positive impressions of the County while also promoting safe and equitable use of designated County park areas and facilities. It encourages compliance with County contracts, rules and regulations, city ordinances, and state statutes.



## SPRING BREAK SNAPSHOT (Okaloosa Island)

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- Beach Census on Okaloosa Island March 2024 was 130K, 33K weekly, 5-7K daily! Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and locals. Power/under-age drinkers, litter, non-ocean swimmers, pets/smoking/glass on the beach. Vendors test the waters to see what they can get away with this year- no disrespect, no judgement- fact.
  - 10 Seasonal Guards already hired, 7 in the queue for 17 out of 23 positions likely filled already. Last year we ran low at 16 during July/peak season (still ZERO drownings). Increase \$1 per hour helped tremendously.

# SPRING BREAK BEACH ACTIVITY

## Okaloosa Island

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## SPRING BREAK SNAPSHOT (Destin Beaches and Crab Island)

- Beach Census on Destin in early March can reach over 100K bi-weekly, over 7K daily! Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Florida and locals. Power/under-age drinkers, litter, non-ocean swimmers, inexperienced boaters, pets/smoking/glass on the beach.



# SPRING BREAK BEACH ACTIVITY

## Destin Beaches and Crab Island

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- Territory spans from Capt. Dave's on the Gulf Restaurant at the Okaloosa/Walton County line to Norriego Point near the Destin Marler Bridge including water patrol of Crab Island.
- Budget: \$1.35 **funded 100% from TDD**. A portion of the personnel costs is dedicated to OCONUS, Australian Lifeguards brought in to serve as Seasonal Employees- Visas paid out of TDD funding.
- Over 650 alcohol-related arrests were made last year, 90% in Destin, many under-age drinking-related.
- 41-60 guards during peak season for 7 miles of beach



# BEACH ACTIVITY

## Statute/Ordinance Reference

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**Florida Statute 125.01** allows for counties to regulate comprehensive public health, safety and welfare on or pertaining to the county beaches, James Lee Park and all parks and recreation areas within the unincorporated areas of Okaloosa County.

**County Ordinance 16-42** sets the authority, purpose and intent of regulating same and adds that, “Local government policy toward the beach, county parks, water bodies and recreational areas should be guided by the recognition that proper management of these areas is vital to the economic development of the county and that all reasonable competing uses of these areas must be protected and balanced.”

**County Ordinance 16-43** regulates use and conduct at the beach, county parks, water bodies and recreational areas in unincorporated Okaloosa County. Definitions and violations are annotated. Section (r) governs enforcement of the article and notes, “The sheriff department, Okaloosa County Public Works Parks Department, Code Enforcement, Tourist Development Department and Okaloosa County Public Safety Department are hereby authorized and directed to remove from the beaches and recreation areas items of personal property that is abandoned or not in accordance with the terms in this article and enforce all other provisions of this article.” As Park Rangers serve under the umbrella of the Public Safety (a Unit of the Beach Safety Division within the Department of Public Safety), Rangers are authorized to enforce this ordinance including all setbacks and vendor regulations, animals/dogs on the beach as noted in 16-43(m) excluding service animals defined in F.S.S 413.08 (dog or mini-horse only) or law enforcement dogs, and the newly-added 16-43(c), smoking and vaping prohibited excluding unfiltered cigars (language adopted by state law).

