



National Environment & Planning Agency

10 & 11 Caledonia Avenue, Kingston 5, Jamaica W.I. Tel: (876) 754-7540 Fax: (876) 754-7595-6, toll free help-line: 1-888-991-5005
Website: <http://www.nepa.gov.jm>

Attention: All News Editors

KINGSTON, Jamaica

July 31, 2026:

NEPA Launches Campaign to Promote Beach and River Safety

Summer has arrived, and with it comes that unmistakable Jamaican energy. The temporary reprieve from the rigours of school life has given way to the unfettered freedom to enjoy fun and exciting activities. Many young people will join friends and families for excursions to any one of the island's beautiful beaches and rivers where they may seek relief from the heat in the cool embrace of the sea or a refreshing river.

Thousands of Jamaicans and visitors alike enjoy these natural environments for swimming, boating, fishing and other recreational activities. Yet amid the excitement, danger may be lurking in the shadows, if persons do not act responsibly. Every year, moments of fun and celebration are overshadowed by heartbreaking incidents of drowning. Beaches and rivers are dynamic natural systems where changing environmental conditions can quickly become hazardous and in a matter of seconds, an outing that began with smiles, ends in tragedy.

Drowning does not discriminate between the experienced swimmer and the novice, the young or the old, nor does it always occur in rough waters. A moment of overconfidence, a lapse in judgment, strong currents, alcohol consumption, or venturing into unfamiliar waters can all have devastating consequences. The sobering reality is that drowning is often swift yet preventable. Recognising the urgent need to reduce preventable drownings, the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) has launched a Beach and River Safety Campaign. The national campaign aims to increase public awareness of beach and river hazards, encourage responsible behaviour around water and foster a culture of water safety among Jamaicans and visitors alike. Through practical advice, public education and strategic partnerships, the campaign will seek to ensure that every visit to the beach or river ends the way it should - with cherished memories, not heartbreaking loss.



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The campaign will involve television and radio features, newspaper articles, social media campaigns, public service announcements, school visits, community workshops and educational resources. The goal is to deliver practical water-safety messages to communities across the island. Emphasis will be placed on children and young adults to encourage lifelong water safety practices, while strengthening collaboration with government agencies, emergency responders, local authorities, schools, community organisations, licensed beach operators and the tourism sector.

Unlike swimming pools and other controlled facilities, beaches and rivers are influenced by constantly changing hydrodynamic, hydrological and meteorological conditions. Coastal waters are affected by wave energy, tides, winds, longshore currents and seabed features, while rivers respond to rainfall, watershed conditions and stream discharge. Consequently, conditions that appear calm can quickly become dangerous, particularly following adverse weather or changing sea conditions.

The latest data provided by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) indicate that natural open-water environments continue to account for the majority of reported drowning fatalities in Jamaica. For the period 2020–2024, rivers and ponds consistently recorded the highest number of reported drowning fatalities, with 15 deaths in 2020, 14 in both 2021 and 2022, 12 in 2023, and 19 in 2024. Beaches recorded the second highest number of reported fatalities, with 13 deaths in 2020, eight in 2021, 10 in both 2022 and 2023, and 13 in 2024. Drownings occurring in resort pools, residential pools and swamps remained comparatively low throughout the reporting period.

One of the most significant hazards at beaches is the rip current; a narrow, fast-moving channel of water flowing away from the shoreline. Rip currents can rapidly carry swimmers away from shore, and attempting to swim directly against the current often results in exhaustion. Rivers present equally serious risks. Heavy rainfall occurring many kilometres upstream can produce sudden increases in water depth and flow velocity downstream, even when weather conditions at the recreation site appear favourable. Hidden drop-offs, submerged debris, undercut riverbanks and slippery rocks further increase the likelihood of accidents.



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Reducing incidents of drowning requires both individual responsibility and sustained public education. Through the Beach and River Safety Campaign, NEPA encourages the public to swim only at beaches where trained and licensed lifeguards are on duty. The Agency is also urging persons to obey warning flags and safety signage and to monitor weather forecasts and marine advisories before venturing out. Additionally, it is advisable to wear approved life jackets during boating and other water-based activities and to avoid entering rivers during or immediately after heavy rainfall. The Agency views as essential, learning basic swimming, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and water survival techniques. NEPA believes that these simple actions can reduce the risk of drowning and improve survival during emergencies.

Supporting these efforts is NEPA's National Lifeguard Examination and Licensing Programme, administered under the Beach Control Act, which establishes national competency standards for lifeguards serving Jamaica's licensed public bathing beaches. Through annual examinations and licensing, the programme ensures that lifeguards possess the technical knowledge, physical competency and practical skills required in water rescue, first aid, CPR and emergency response. The campaign also supports capacity building through engagement with beach operators and lifeguards while promoting consistent safety messaging and responsible beach management practices.

In launching the Beach and River Safety Campaign, NEPA reaffirms its commitment to protecting lives through data-driven public education, community engagement, strategic partnerships and professional lifeguard standards. By understanding water-related hazards, respecting the power of nature and making informed decisions before entering the water, every Jamaican can help reduce the risk of drowning incidents and view beaches and rivers as safe and welcoming places for recreation and enjoyment. As we enjoy the season, it's important to bear in mind that the best summer memories are the ones that everyone lives to share.

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For more information, please contact:

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NEPA is urging persons to heed warning signs at beaches



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Fun in the sun begins with safe choices. Whether you're swimming, wading or simply enjoying the shoreline, your safety should always come first.