

Considerations for Near Shore Operations and Operators

In NOAA's history there have been boat accidents which have occurred in or near high energy surf zones. One of these accidents resulted in a fatality. Although the error chain and causes of these accidents vary, there is a very pressing need to ensure that any boat operator who is required by a NOAA mission to operate in or near (within one mile) a high or potentially high energy surf zone is made aware of, and gains proficiency in, the behavior and hazards of operating a boat in or around waves and beaches. While it is impractical to require that all surf zone boat operators have surfing experience, the need to have or attempt to approach the depth of surf understanding possessed by surfers is critical to abating the inherent risk of surf zone operations (e.g., breaker formation, shoulders, wave periods, rip currents, timing of wave sets, refraction and reflection, long shore currents, sand bar migration, and a whole host of other wave and beach behaviors).

Given the dangers, all NOAA OICs should avoid operating in a surf zone unless there has been proper planning done, precautions taken, and the following guidelines be considered. In the event an OIC must enter a surf zone, the OIC should:

- Ensure a backup boat or helicopter is available,
- Ensure communications are established with another boat with backup communications,
- If available, have a spotter(s) on the beach,
- All crewmembers shall wear a life preserver and helmet and the OIC shall endeavor to avoid all breaking waves while operating the boat in or near a surf zone,
- The OIC shall make every attempt to minimize the time operating in or near a surf zone.

A recommended book for OICs to gain knowledge in reading ocean waves is "Waves and Beaches: The Dynamics of the Ocean Surface" by Willard Bascom. Although it is out of print it is available at online retailers or possibly through your local library.

Specific Publication Information:

Title: "Waves and Beaches: The Dynamics of the Ocean Surface"

Author: Willard Bascom

Paperback: 366 pages

Publisher: Anchor Press; Revised Edition (1980)

ISBN: 0385148453