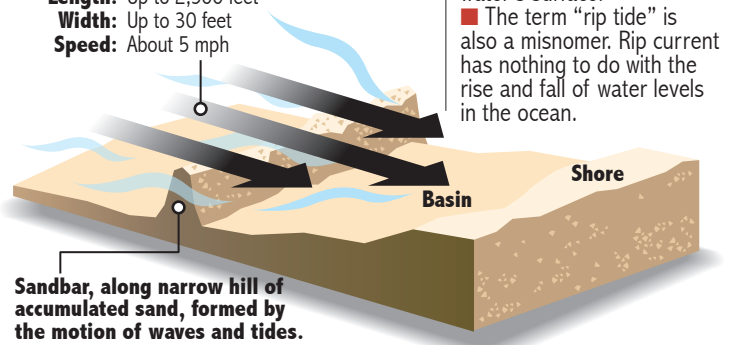
HOW RIP CURRENTS CAUSE DROWNINGS

A rip current is a narrow, powerful current of water being pushed toward the shore by strong winds from the sea. Here's a look at how it can endanger the lives of swimmers on the beach

1 A swell of water forms a rip current that rushes to the shore along the surface of the sea. Some of the water underneath are held back by sandbars.

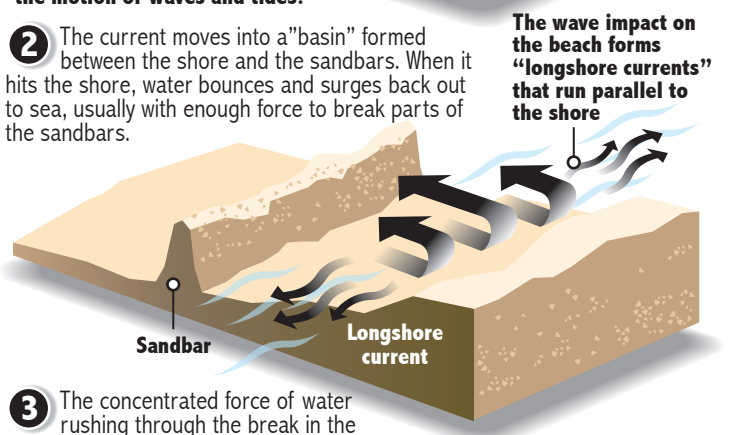
Length: Up to 2,500 feet
Width: Up to 30 feet
Speed: About 5 mph



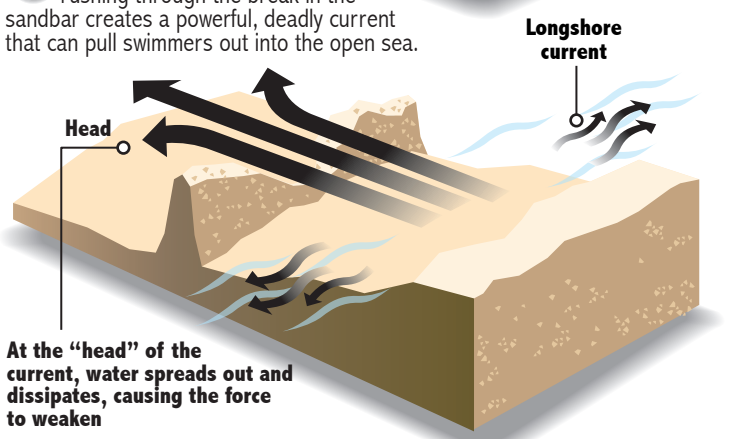
SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- Rip current is not the same as "undertow." Undertow describes current running underneath the water's surface.
- The term "rip tide" is also a misnomer. Rip current has nothing to do with the rise and fall of water levels in the ocean.

2 The current moves into a"basin" formed between the shore and the sandbars. When it hits the shore, water bounces and surges back out to sea, usually with enough force to break parts of the sandbars.



3 The concentrated force of water rushing through the break in the sandbar creates a powerful, deadly current that can pull swimmers out into the open sea.



Sources: www.howstuffworks.com; http://newton.dep.an.org; www.everything2.com

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