

WATER SAFETY

Part of the beauty of living in Okinawa is the opportunity to explore its many beaches, but before participating in any water-related activity, everyone should keep in mind that sea conditions can be extremely dangerous and change very rapidly.

Every year, a number of SOFA-status personnel on Okinawa either died or needed to be rescued because of water-related mishaps. This includes fatalities primarily from snorkeling, scuba diving, cliff diving and wave watching. Each could have been prevented by using proper personal risk management or wearing the proper personal protective equipment.

In an effort to protect service members and their families, the 18th Wing commander recently re-emphasized the following policies, which are mandatory for all active duty service members assigned here. The commander encourages family members and civilian employees to follow it as well.

- Before participating in any water-related activity, personnel will check the official Okinawa sea conditions set by the Kadena Weather Flight (see explanation below).
- During SEA CONDITION ALL CLEAR, conditions are ideal for water activities.
- During SEA CONDITION CAUTION, hazardous conditions may exist. Exercise caution when entering the water. Individuals participating in water activities should have extensive experience in the planned activity and with the location.
- During SEA CONDITION DANGER, life-threatening conditions exist. Water entry is prohibited for all activities. Water entry is also prohibited when local conditions result in the closure of a beach/coastal area.
- Swimmers will use the buddy-system when swimming in areas without lifeguards.
- Personnel will not participate in cliff/bridge jumping or diving.
- Scuba divers shall be certified, wear the appropriate PPE.
- Snorkelers entering the water at locations without lifeguards will wear an appropriately-sized personal flotation device and use the buddy system.
- Surfers/body boarders will attach a leash from the user to the board.
- Personal water craft operators and occupants will wear approved PFD (e.g. life vest) at all times. Operator must have a tethered kill switch/cord.
- Personnel in sea kayaks will wear an approved PFD at all times.

Sea conditions defined

The following are the sea conditions definitions posted on Armed Forces Network television channels daily. Current sea conditions are also posted on the [Shogun Weather Homepage](#).

- **SC-AC (All Clear):** Conditions which are ideal for water related activities. Wind speeds have been reported at less than 18 MPH (16 Knots). Locally assessed conditions are suitable for novice water enthusiasts intending to participate in the location's primary water activities.
- **SC-C (Caution):** Hazardous conditions may exist. Exercise caution when entering the water. Wind speeds of 18 MPH (16 Knots) or greater, including gusts, have been observed for at least 3 hours. Locally assessed conditions warrant that individuals participating in water activities have extensive experience both in the planned activity and at the location.
- **SC-D (Danger):** Life threatening conditions exist. Water entry is prohibited for all activities. Wind speeds of 35 MPH (30 Knots) or greater, including gusts, have been observed and are to persist for at least 3 hours or during Tropical Cyclone Condition of Readiness (TCCOR) 2. Locally assessed conditions are dangerous and warrant restricting access to the water and removal of individuals from the water. Note - Military facilities will cease rental of water

recreation equipment in SC-D.

Coastal Locations defined

- West (W) - East China Sea shoreline, Hedo Point (northern tip) west down to Cape Kiyon (southern tip) North, Northwest, West and Southwest
- East (E) - Pacific Ocean shoreline, Hedo Point (northern tip) east down to Cape Kiyon (southern tip) Northeast, East, South and Southeast

Most DANGEROUS water spots

Some areas have been the site of more of the U.S. military's fatalities and near misses. Marine Corps Base Camp Butler Installation Safety lists the seven most dangerous spots as:

- Camp Zampa Misaki, also known as Bolo Point, is just west of Torii Station.
- Maeda Point is near Onna Village.
- Miyagi Island is part of the Ikei Island chain. The popular Big Time Resort is here.
- Hedo Misaki, also called Hedo Point or Cape Hedo, is at the island's northern tip.
- Onna Point is in Onna Village.
- Hiji Falls is near Okuma Military Resort.
- Ikei Island Bridge is near White Beach Naval Facility.

Warning signs for SOFA personnel are posted at all above locations except for Hiji Falls where signs strictly prohibit SOFA personnel from entering the water.

For the latest III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Corps Installations Pacific Order, click [here](#).

For more information on sea conditions and water safety, please refer to [III MEF/MCIPACO 5101.1 Ch1](#) or contact the MCIPAC Installation Safety Office at 645-3806.