

This is Troy Nicolini with the National Weather Service with your Community Comment.

Sadly, we have had another tragic death on our coast. A young Humboldt State University Student was washed off of the north jetty while fishing. I want to use this Community Comment to share some critical safety points regarding the rocks and jetties on our coast.

Rocks and Jetties are particularly dangerous because they give people a false sense of security. If you've ever been up on a cliff looking down at the ocean and thought that the waves looked very small, then you've experienced an extreme situation where being high up makes the ocean seem calmer than it really is. This also happens for people who are on rocks and jetties. Even though they may only be 5 feet above the ocean, being up that high can make the ocean seem much less dangerous than it really is.

Rocks and Jetties are also incredibly dangerous because once a person does get pulled into the ocean, it is practically impossible to get back out. Part of the problem is that the water is so cold around here that if you get pulled into the ocean you lose the ability to use your arms and legs within a few minutes. Because of these dangers, the safest decision is to completely avoid walking or fishing on rocks and jetties. If you can't follow that guideline then here are some rules to live by:

If you must go onto rocks and jetties, then wear a life jacket or life vest. If you do get pulled into the water then you will have a fighting chance. Today's life vests are very comfortable to wear, they help keep you warm, and many have pockets for your gear.

Only go on rocks and jetties during the quietest summer months and totally avoid them during the winter months.

Never climb down close to the water. It is impossible to predict when the next wave will come in and catch you off guard.

Watch the tides. Going out onto a rock or jetty during a rising tide can result in the waves washing over areas that were dry for hours beforehand.

Before going out onto rocks or jetties, look to see if they are wet. This is a good indication that waves washed over the rocks in the recent past. But dry rocks are not a guarantee that waves will not wash over...especially if the tide is rising.

Your safest approach is to watch the waves for 20 minutes to make sure they are not breaking over the rocks and jetties. You have to wait that long to make sure you see the biggest waves that are occurring. The biggest waves come in sets with smaller waves occurring in between the sets. Those periods of smaller waves can last many minutes. So use your watch or smart phone timer to make sure you watch the ocean for a long time. One way to make this recommendation practical is to get out to a safe vantage point but within earshot of the ocean, and then begin getting your fishing gear ready, such as tying leaders, etc. Listen to the ocean and glance up periodically to see if any sets are washing over the rock or jetty.

Please share this message, especially with young people you know since they are often drawn to rocks and jetties.

This has been Troy Nicolini with your Community Comment