



*NOAA – National Weather Service
San Francisco Bay Area – Monterey, CA
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Sneaker Waves Fact Sheet

What Are Sneaker Waves? A sneaker wave is an unexpectedly large wave that is higher, stronger, and reaches farther up the beach to levels beyond where the normal waves reach. It can appear in a wave train with no warning.

Why are Sneaker Waves dangerous? As they are larger than preceding waves, sneaker waves can be unexpected to beachgoers, people fishing, or swimmers and wash them out to sea. The time between the waves is long, which can cause people to focus their attention off the ocean surf. This can be especially dangerous for people walking, fishing, or standing on beaches and ocean jetties or rocks. They are especially dangerous to children who can be caught in the current and pulled out into deep water. People can drown if they cannot escape the current, and many times they are so unexpected that people are in shock or surprised when they are knocked into the water, or they might not even be facing the water when an unexpectedly large wave hits. Sneaker waves can also toss around larger driftwood logs or other debris which can injure people.

Are Sneaker Waves Predictable? The general conditions that are favorable for sneaker waves can be predicted. Very long periods of arriving ocean swell (meaning time between the waves) are favorable for sneaker waves. This is because the waves will have more energy, which gives them more power and potential for some of the waves to be larger and run up farther on the beaches. However, they can come in any time of day or night, during storms, or during calm weather.

Do Sneaker Waves happen everywhere? They can, but are most favored in areas with large open ocean fetch, like the West Coast of the United States.

Have these been deadly for people in our area? Yes. The unfortunate fact is that every year, people on our beaches die from these sneaker waves. Many times this is people who are visiting the area and may be unfamiliar with the dangers our beaches can have, or people fishing on rocks, or from people who have a dog that is swept into the ocean and they attempt to save their pet. Within the past few months, several deaths have occurred in this area from sneaker waves. The important thing to know is that all these deaths are preventable – and through public awareness and education, we can help to get the word out on these dangerous and unexpected beach conditions.

Safety Tips for Sneaker Waves:

Never turn your back on the surf and closely supervise children on the beach.

Stay back from the water's edge and avoid slippery rocks.

Don't go in the water after dogs.

If someone is pulled into the water, call 9-1-1 or alert a lifeguard immediately.