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BAY AREA

Deadly ocean incidents show coastline dangers



SHERRY LAVARS — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

Hikers walk on the edge of a cliff in the Marin Headlands near Sausalito on Sunday. Officials attribute a recent surge of deaths from waves on people underestimating the risks of being near the ocean.

Breaking waves have claimed 10 victims since November

By Martha Ross
Bay Area News Group

Before 12-year-old Arunay Pruthi was swept into the Pacific Ocean, his family never imagined that he or anyone else could be at risk. The weather was unseasonably warm when the Pruthi family visited Cowell Ranch State Beach near Half Moon Bay on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. There was a light breeze and the ocean seemed calm, with wave after wave gently tumbling up the golden sand. But without warning, a wave of unexpected size and power — a sneaker wave — surged up the beach to

where Arunay, his father and 8-year-old brother were. The wave knocked the Fremont boy down with cold force, then rapidly withdrew, pulling him out past the line of breaking waves. Within minutes, the seventh-grader was drifting away, becoming the latest of 10 people — including three other children — to fall victim to high waves hitting Northern California coastal areas since November. Officials with the U.S. Coast Guard, National Weather Service and California State Parks agree that so many deaths in such a short span is unusual. In 2019, there were five fatal-



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A flyer is posted for Arunay Pruthi, 12, missing since Jan. 18 after being swept into the ocean at Cowell Ranch State Beach in Half Moon Bay.

ities in Northern California the entire year; in 2018, there were two. They can't attribute the fatalities to any unusual Pacific Ocean activity or weather conditions.

They can only say that people often underestimate the risks of being near the ocean in Northern California, especially in the winter.

WAVES » PAGE 2

MARIN

Possible easing of virus rules for county

Cases decline, but lack of vaccine slows doses

By Richard Halstead
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Marin County could move into the state's red tier for coronavirus risk by mid-month, enabling more businesses to open indoors with limits if the trend continues, the county's public health officer said Tuesday.

"We are among the larger counties that may be headed toward the red tier," Dr. Matt Willis told Marin County supervisors. "It's something that could happen as early as mid-February if our numbers continue to improve."

Willis said that among medium- and large-sized counties across the state, Marin has the lowest incidence of the virus, but cautioned that "we don't want to be falsely reassured by this."

"We are being graded on a curve here," he said. California is one of the hardest hit states in the country, Willis said. He said Marin residents need to continue to wear masks, maintain physical distancing and avoid indoor gatherings.

"The vaccine is not moving nearly quickly enough into Marin to be the solution to surges in cases," he said.

In fact, Willis said, a lack of vaccine coming from the state is making it difficult for the county to offer a first dose to a sizable number of additional Marin residents.

So far, the county has vaccinated more than 34,000 residents, about 11% of the population. Most of those vaccinated are health care and long-term care workers.

The county is now offering vaccinations to anyone 75 or older and has vaccinated about 8,000 of its 24,000 residents in this category.

VIRUS » PAGE 2

PANDEMIC

State officials seek plan to reopen schools

Newsom, lawmakers look for compromise solution

By John Woolfolk
Bay Area News Group

Gov. Gavin Newsom and state lawmakers are in talks on a new path for getting more public schools to reopen as the governor's late-December plan offering money and aid for those that move quickly to bring students back on campus comes under withering fire from districts, teacher unions and legislators.

Monday was the deadline in Newsom's \$2 billion Safe Schools for All Plan announced Dec. 30 for schools to file reopening plans and qualify for the funding, but the Legislature has yet to act on it, leaving its status in doubt.

And last week, a bill was pulled from committee that would set a requirement for schools to reopen within two weeks of their county case rates falling to the level state and local health orders say is safe to resume in-person instruction.

SCHOOLS » PAGE 2

PREVENTION STEPS

San Rafael tightens wildfire safety rules

By Matthew Pera
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San Rafael has adopted new regulations aimed at preventing homes from burning in wildfires. The City Council voted unanimously on Monday to approve laws to restrict parking on narrow streets and require homeowners to tear out flammable trees. The parking restrictions allow city workers to install "no parking" signs on both sides of any street that is less than 20 feet wide, and on one side of any street that is less than 30 feet wide. The city plans to paint "parking boxes" on those roads in places where cars can be parked.

The boxes will be marked by city workers who will walk the narrow streets beside a fire engine, measuring to find places where there is enough distance for the engine to pass if a car is parked on the side of the road. Cars parked outside the marked spaces "should be ticketed and removed as quickly as possible," a city report says. The parking restrictions will help ensure that firefighters can access homes and residents can evacuate during wildfires, said Quinn Gardner, a city emergency management official. "It's very important for routine emergency access as well," Gardner said, adding that the restrictions will also



MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

A member of the AmeriCorps clears brush from a hill above San Rafael in 2019. The city has adopted a new vegetation management ordinance.

provide more space for delivery trucks. Larry Luckham, a San Rafael fire commissioner and former volunteer photog-

rapher for the city's fire department, said cars parked on narrow roads can present a challenge for firefighters.

FIRE » PAGE 4

FLORIDA CRIME
2 FBI agents killed, 3 hurt, suspect dead
 Two FBI agents have been killed and three wounded while trying to serve a search warrant on a child porn suspect. PAGE A7



POLITICS
Biden team signs orders on immigration
 The Biden administration is taking steps to address harm to of families that were separated at the U.S.-Mexico border. PAGE A5

BUSINESS
 Dow Jones 30,687 (+475.57)
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