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## Several Surfers Are Found Dead in the Netherlands

At least five bodies were found or seen in the foamy waters off the beach resort of Scheveningen, a district of The Hague.



The Dutch Coast Guard started a search operation on Monday after six surfers went missing. The rescue efforts were complicated by strong winds and a rough sea, the service said on Twitter. Credit...Sem Van Der Wal/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



By [Elian Peltier](#)

Five surfers drowned off the coast of the Dutch beach resort of Scheveningen after they were caught in strong winds and foamy waters, the local authorities said on Tuesday.

Rescuers from the Dutch Coast Guard began a search operation shortly after six surfers went missing Monday evening. Three people were rescued, two of whom were later pronounced dead. Two further bodies were found Tuesday morning, and one more was seen floating out to sea. The Coast Guard ended its search in the early afternoon and said it had not found that last person, taking the toll to five.

The deaths shocked the surfing community in the Netherlands and locals in Scheveningen, a district of The Hague about 30 miles southwest of Amsterdam. “When a group of people went surfing early in the evening, no one expected that some would not come home,” Johan Remkes, mayor of The Hague, [said in a statement](#).

The rescue operation was complicated by strong winds and a rough sea, the Dutch Coast Guard said on Twitter. “There are still water sports enthusiasts active in the vicinity of our search area,” the service wrote Monday evening. “We call on them to leave this area as soon as possible.”

Other European countries have severely restricted outdoor activities during the coronavirus pandemic, but the Netherlands has taken a more relaxed approach, only asking people to stay at home as much as possible and to respect social distancing practices when outside. Many beaches are closed, but surfing has been allowed as long as surfers respect 1.5-meter distances according to the [Holland Surfing Association](#).

As of Tuesday, the Netherlands had reported nearly 43,000 confirmed coronavirus infections and 5,456 deaths. The Dutch authorities loosened lockdown measures this week, including a partial reopening of schools.

A popular beach resort known for its annual [New Year’s Day plunge](#), when thousands of Dutch take a dip in the icy waters of the North Sea, Scheveningen is known as the best spot for surfing in the Netherlands. “The North Sea is a fickle bitch, but that makes it a special and rewarding playground,” said [Yannick de Jager](#), a surfer based in Scheveningen.

Among the five victims, three are believed to be seasoned surfers who were professional trainers in open water swimming, according to NOS, a Dutch public broadcaster.

The six surfers went missing shortly after 7 p.m. Monday, [according to emergency service officials](#), and the rescue operation was interrupted once night fell. Using a helicopter and lifeboats, rescuers resumed their search at dawn Tuesday amid strong winds.

Television footage showed some trudging through the water on foot, and the helicopter flying low to blow the sea foam away to help locate bodies.

More people may still be missing, surfers told Dutch news outlets, as several others may have found themselves struggling to return to shores on Monday. Some surfers told the news agency Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau that the thick foam made it especially difficult for those who had fallen from their boards to return to shore.

The Dutch Coast Guard and The Hague authorities have asked any surfers who may have come out of the water on their own to make contact, saying that several additional surf boards and kite surf boards had been found. A message, “Please check if 1 of these boards is yours!” was posted

on the city’s Twitter account.

Scheveningen residents mourned the five deceased surfers on Tuesday by laying wreaths of flowers at the seaside, and by sharing on social media pictures of five herrings on a dark background — a reference to the city’s flag, which has three fish.

Thomas Erdbrink contributed reporting.