

Five experienced surfers die as ‘avalanche’ of sea foam strikes Dutch coast

By

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Authorities in the Netherlands [said](#) Wednesday they were suspending until the next morning a search for a surfer who was last seen slipping beneath the water’s surface Monday. The 23-year-old man was among five experienced surfers who died amid what was described as an “avalanche” of sea foam off the coast of The Hague.

One surfer was rescued, according to the Royal Netherlands Sea Rescue Institution ([KNRM](#)), but the sea foam, along with rough waters and high winds, impeded efforts by first responders and the Dutch Coast Guard. Two surfers were pronounced dead Monday, and the bodies of two others were retrieved Tuesday from the North Sea waters at Scheveningen, one of the country’s most popular destinations for the sport.

The sea foam, estimated to be as much as six feet deep, could have made it difficult for the surfers to get back on their boards and to see where they were in relation to the coastline. The victims, who hailed from The Hague and nearby Delft, ranged in age from 22 to 38 (per [the Guardian](#)).

“Young, physically fit, sporty people who know the sea like the back of their hand somehow got into trouble,” the acting mayor of The Hague, Johan Remkes, [said](#) Tuesday in a statement.

“People here understand better than anybody else that the sea gives and the sea takes,” Remkes added. “But the way in which so many young lives ended abruptly and so many families and groups of friends have been affected is incredibly brutal.”

Pat Smith, [elected](#) in March as the “night mayor” of The Hague, said (via [nltimes.nl](#)) he knew two of the surfers “very well” because, like him, they were internationally trained lifeguards. “They were busy training [on Monday],” Smith said (via [Agence France-Presse](#)). “They then disappeared under the foam like it was some sort of avalanche.”

To locate victims, the Coast Guard used a helicopter to try to blow away some of the sea foam. Joining emergency services Wednesday in the search for the fifth surfer was the Dutch Ministry of Defense, which brought in equipment to search underwater (via [nltimes.nl](#)). Police reportedly said that the survivor was a 40-year-old man who returned home after receiving medical attention.

A water-sports club at Scheveningen [posted](#) a photo Tuesday of several surfboards and asked that they be claimed so that “the KNRM knows they don’t have to look any further for victims.” Mourners brought flowers to the scene, and the Holland Surfing Association said its community was “in deep mourning for this loss.”

In late March, the Holland Surfing Association [posted](#) novel [coronavirus](#)-related guidelines, including avoiding contact with others and keeping a distance of 1.5 meters, approximately five feet. It noted that organized lessons and competitions were barred by the Dutch government but that recreational surfing was allowed on the basis of individual responsibility.

Unlike European countries that responded to the global pandemic by imposing strict shelter-in-place measures, the Netherlands opted for a more relaxed approach that has been dubbed “intelligent lockdown” (via [CBS News](#)). While restaurants, bars and museums there have shut down and people are advised to stay at home as much as possible, they have the freedom to move about as long as they stay five feet away from each other.

Nevertheless, Remkes referred to the added difficulties of the times in [saying](#) Wednesday that the coronavirus “makes it even more difficult for surviving relatives” of the surfers.

The day before, the mayor had given voice to the bewilderment over such a bizarre tragedy that accompanied the anguish for so many in The Hague.

“How is it possible that such experienced surfers were completely taken by surprise at a spot they knew so well?” Remkes asked in his statement. “But also: How is it possible that a drama unfolded at one harbor inlet while at the other harbor inlet, not even 100 meters away, people were still surfing until late in the evening?”

Remkes promised a thorough investigation into “what happened exactly and what combination of circumstances led to this fatal outcome.”