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Controversy continues to grow over Jet Ski use at local beaches, bays

Family of girl hit by lifeguard on a Jet Ski sues city for negligence



Ali Polidori photos. Images are handouts from family.



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Controversy continues to grow over the use of devices commonly known by the brand name Jet Ski at San Diego's beaches and bays.

Amid an ongoing [crackdown](#) by San Diego lifeguards on unlicensed rentals of the devices on Mission Bay, a family is turning the tables by blaming a city lifeguard for running over their daughter in La Jolla Cove with a Jet Ski.

The family of Ali Polidori says city lifeguards are being hypocritical when they continually blame the problem on illegal rental companies failing to provide users safety instructions.

In a new lawsuit, the family says lifeguards themselves are a key part of the problem based on the behavior of one guard in December 2023 who ripped open their daughter's head while going more than 20 mph on a Jet Ski.

The lifeguard zipped across La Jolla Cove's swimming area much faster than normal because she was responding to an emergency call of another swimmer in distress, according to a 30-page police report on the incident.

The lawsuit, filed in July, says the lifeguard was traveling at an unreasonable and dangerous speed and not exercising due caution, especially in an area where all vessels are banned except if driven by lifeguards.

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City officials declined to respond to the allegations because of the pending litigation. While Lifeguard Chief James Gartland has focused on illegal rentals, he has never said they are the only problem related to the devices.

Gartland has stressed that crashes are more common when people rent from illegal operators, because those operators typically focus less on explaining safety protocols and how to avoid hazards in the bay.

Lifeguards receive extensive training on how to operate the devices, city officials say.

The Polidori lawsuit is the second the city is facing over Jet Skis.

The family of a 12-year-old paddleboarder killed in July 2023 on Mission Bay, Savannah Peterson, has sued the city for damages, contending officials knew of the dangers and didn't do enough to keep people safe.

Peterson was killed by 18-year-old Arsanyous Refat Ghaly, who pleaded guilty to vehicular manslaughter and was sentenced last fall to 230 days in custody and two years of probation.

Ali Polidori, 19, survived her December 2023 crash in La Jolla



Savannah Peterson was struck and killed

Her lawsuit, which seeks \$3 million in damages, says she has also suffered a loss of confidence and deteriorating mental health.

A former triathlete and diver who graduated from Torrey Pines High School, Polidori was “a shell of her former student-athlete self” when she returned to the U.S. Naval Academy after the crash, the lawsuit says.

“Polidori felt mentally slow from the head trauma, and had to spend additional time studying and preparing for class to maintain her academic standing,” her lawsuit says. “Physically, the injuries prevented Polidori from competing with the Triathlon Team during the 2024 spring semester, which had a detrimental impact on Polidori’s confidence and continued leadership development.”

A key question raised by the lawsuit is whether the lifeguard was justified in moving so quickly through a swimming area where swimmers don’t expect there to be fast-moving devices of any kind.

The police report seems inconsistent on this issue.

It says traveling at 20 to 25 mph “does not appear to represent reckless or negligent operation,” adding that “the speed was within the act of operating within due regard for the public.”

But the report also says the lifeguard appears to have violated international navigation rules, particularly operating the 800-pound device at a speed greater than her ability to avoid collision and failing to use a proper lookout.

The report says sun glare could have been a factor, noting the incident took place just before 2:30 p.m.

The report says the lifeguard appears to have spotted Polidori, who was wearing a bright yellow cap to make herself more conspicuous, at the last second and turned sharply enough to make the collision somewhat less direct.

Normal protocol is for lifeguards traveling on Jet Skis to remain at least 100 yards from shore, but the lifeguard in this case was responding to another incident where a swimmer was in distress. The lawsuit says the urgency of that incident might have been exaggerated.