



NOAA FISHERIES

Pacific Islands Regional Office



Marine Mammal Strandings

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a stranding?

A stranded (or “beached”) whale or dolphin is an animal that is:

- Alive on shore and sick, injured, dying from old age, and/or trapped or disoriented
- Dead on shore or floating offshore

What can you do to help?



Call the Marine Animal Emergency Hotline:

(888) 256-9840

Keep your phone handy and stand by for a call back.

Tell the hotline: The animal’s exact location, whether it’s alive or dead, it’s size and color, and if it’s injured, entangled, etc.



Observe the stranded animal from at least 50 feet away and keep your dogs leashed. Don’t attempt to touch, move, or feed it.



Share this FAQ with friends and family, help with beach cleanups, or volunteer with the response network.

Should the animal be put back in the water?

No. A whale or dolphin may strand to avoid predators or because it’s unable to swim normally or stay at the water surface and breathe. Dragging a stranded animal back into the water can cause serious injury to it or to you. Safety first! These are wild, unpredictable animals that can injure us with their strength, size, or teeth, and can transmit diseases. Injured animals may also attract sharks.

Can we predict strandings?

No. Whale and dolphin strandings are unpredictable and can happen at any time, which is why your help is needed! The Pacific Islands Region Marine Mammal Response Network consists of experts who are specially trained to deal with stranding emergencies. They rely on partner organizations and the public to report strandings to the Hotline - **(888) 256-9840**.

Why do marine mammals strand?

Natural Causes

- Insufficient weight gain
- Separation from mother
- Weakened immune system
- Bacterial infections
- Viruses
- Injuries from a predator
- Severe weather events
- Parasites

Human-related Causes

- Injury from a boat strike
- Ingesting trash (marine debris) including plastic bags and fish hooks
- Entanglement in nets, lines, or other marine debris
- Sonar or seismic activity
- Pollution

What happens next?

Dolphins and whales are at home in the ocean, so if they are on shore it means that something is wrong, even if they appear to be okay. An authorized veterinarian will assess the health of each stranded animal. It may then be released, taken to a rehabilitation facility, or humanely euthanized to reduce suffering from severe injury or illness.

What can we learn from strandings?

Dolphins and whales are an important part of our ecosystem. By studying strandings, we not only learn more about these animals and ways to better protect them, but may also be able to detect the presence of contaminants or diseases that could potentially harm humans. Studying strandings gives us important information about the health of our oceans.



Federal law prohibits disturbing, touching, or feeding marine mammals without authorization. The Response Network has authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act.