

NEWS RELEASE

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Sharing Our Shores with Seals

(Virginia Beach, VA) If you've been out on the beach or aboard one of our Whales & Wildlife boat trips recently, you may have noticed that you're sharing space with some marine visitors. Seals have been seen recently in Virginia waters, and some are hauling out on our local beaches. Sometimes these seals stop on local beaches to rest, and sometimes they are too tired or sick to continue the journey. That's where the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Response Program steps in to help.

The Stranding Response Team noted that there have been a lot of seal sighting reports recently. Although not uncommon, these animals are wild and should be treated with caution.

"As of right now, most of the seals have returned to the ocean on their own," said Stranding Response Program Coordinator Alex Costidis. "However, we want to remind citizens that the best thing to do when encountering a seal is to keep their distance and call us so we can evaluate the animal's behavior and condition."

Citizens should not feed seals, nor should anyone fish or discard bait in the water near seals. They are wild animals and feeding them not only encourages them to lose their natural fear of humans, but it's also illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. In addition, seals can carry parasites and diseases, so citizens and their pets should steer clear and view safely from a distance. Immediately report seal sightings to the Stranding Response Team by calling the 24-hour hotline, 757-385-7575.

When a live seal is reported, the Stranding Response Team evaluates the health of the animal. During this time, citizens may see a member of the team observing or photographing the animal. The team examines everything from the seal's posture to its appearance and behavior.

If you're interested in safely seeing seals, the Aquarium offers several boat trips in search of winter visitors, including seals and whales. The Whales & Wildlife boat trip ventures to areas where seals and whales are known to frequently visit. Information on these trips can be found at <https://www.virginiaaquarium.com/learn/boat-trips>

When viewing marine animals on the water, please do not approach seals, sea turtles, or dolphins closer than 50 yards and do not approach the animals head on. If you do need to maneuver closer to the animals due to channel markers, obstacles, or shallow water, please set a slow speed and straight course. For more information on how to observe these animals safely while you are boating, please visit:

<http://www.virginiaaquarium.com/conservate/sightings-information>

The Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program's mission is to promote the conservation of marine animal species through stranding response, research, rehabilitation and education. It is largely a volunteer-based group operating from the Aquarium's Marine Animal Care Center in Virginia Beach. The program is supported by the Virginia Aquarium Foundation through donations from the community, and grant-making organizations. To report a dead or live stranded marine mammal or sea turtle call the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program 24-hour hotline at (757) 385-7575.

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