

# Entanglement



VIRGINIA  
**AQUARIUM**  
& MARINE SCIENCE CENTER

*Demonstrate the challenges for marine animals who get entangled in marine debris.*

## Duration

Activity: 10 – 15 minutes

## Supplies

- Pictures of entangled marine animals (included)
- Rubber Bands (1 per student)
- Examples of entanglement materials (rope, fishing line, plastic bag)
- Timer/Watch

## Background

Marine animals such as sea turtles, seals, whales, and dolphins can become entangled in fishing gear and other **marine debris** floating in the ocean. An entanglement can cause restrictions to the animals so they drown or starve or may cause trauma and infection from the debris cutting into them. If you see an animal that is entangled, contact your region's stranding responders. It's important to note the GPS coordinates or location, take photos and videos, and wait until responders arrive to provide the best chance for the animal to be disentangled. Do not try to disentangle the animal yourself. If you are in Virginia, you can contact the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Response about stranded or entangled marine mammals and sea turtles at 757-385-7575.

## Instructions

1. Brainstorm types of trash that can end up in the ocean becoming marine debris. Identify the source of the trash (where did it originate) and how it might have ended up in the ocean.
2. Think about how the marine debris could impact marine animals. List out all possible threats to the animals from marine debris.
3. Show them examples of marine debris such as rope, fishing line, and plastic bags to help them brainstorm why these materials might be a problem for those animals.
4. Explain to students they are going to become a marine animal that has been entangled and you are going to test their skills on getting untangled.
5. Give them a rubber band and have them stretch it from their thumb to pinky finger going behind their hand. They must get the rubber band off their hand without using any body part or other type of assistance.
6. After they've worked for 30 seconds, ask them: how they feel? Are they frustrated? Did they make any progress? How might getting tangled in marine debris be bad for a marine animal? How might this impact their life? Can they do everything they need to do to survive?



7. Show student(s) pictures of animals found entangled off our coast and how the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Response Team responds to these live and dead entanglements. Background on the animals are located with the pictures.
8. Discuss with student(s) ways they can help keep marine debris out of the ocean.

## Vocabulary

**Marine debris:** defined as any persistent solid material that is manufactured or processed and directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, disposed of or abandoned into the marine environment or the Great Lakes.

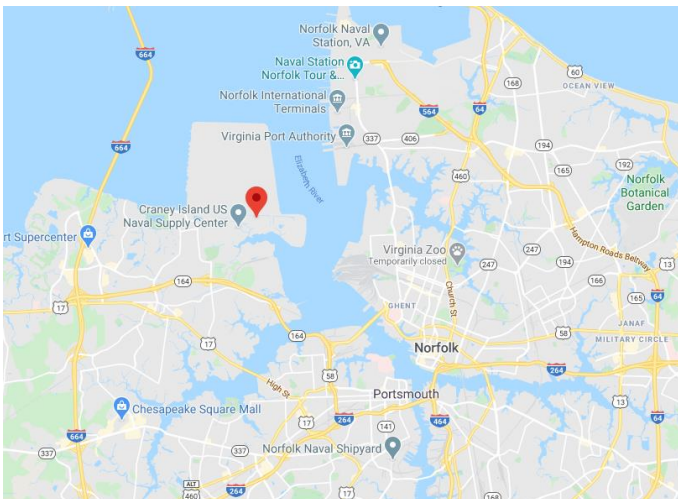
## Extension

Have students create an action project that reduces marine debris in the ocean such as a clean-up or creating a recycling center for fishing gear at a local pier.



This Atlantic bottlenose dolphin was found off Craney Island in 2003 entangled by two crab pots wrapped around its head and dorsal fin. The animal was disentangled in the water and released.

**Craney Island, Portsmouth**



**Crab Pot Gear**





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A humpback whale was found entangled in a gill net off Little Island Fishing Pier in 2007. It was successfully disentangled and released and had been sighted previously in the area.

### Gill Net Fishery



"Fish tug lifting gill nets full of Whitefish on the Great Lakes." By DV Mark is licensed under CC PDM 1.0



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Leatherbacks are the largest of the sea turtle species and are occasionally spotted in our coastal waters. This leatherback sea turtle was found entangled in a pound net off the Eastern Shore in May 2015 and was released successfully.

**Pound Net**



“Pound nets with cormorants” by Funchye is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0