

MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING RESPONSE FACT SHEET

What is a stranded marine mammal?

A cetacean (whale, dolphin, or porpoise) is considered stranded when it is on the beach, dead or alive, or in need of medical attention while free-swimming in U.S. waters. A pinniped (seal or sea lion) is considered to be stranded either when dead or when in distress on the beach and not displaying normal haul-out behaviors. Live-stranded animals are usually in need of medical attention or free-swimming but cannot return to their natural habitat without assistance.

Single strandings involve one animal per event and occur frequently, depending on geographic area and time of year. Each year, 3,500 to 6,000 stranded marine mammals are reported to the National Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

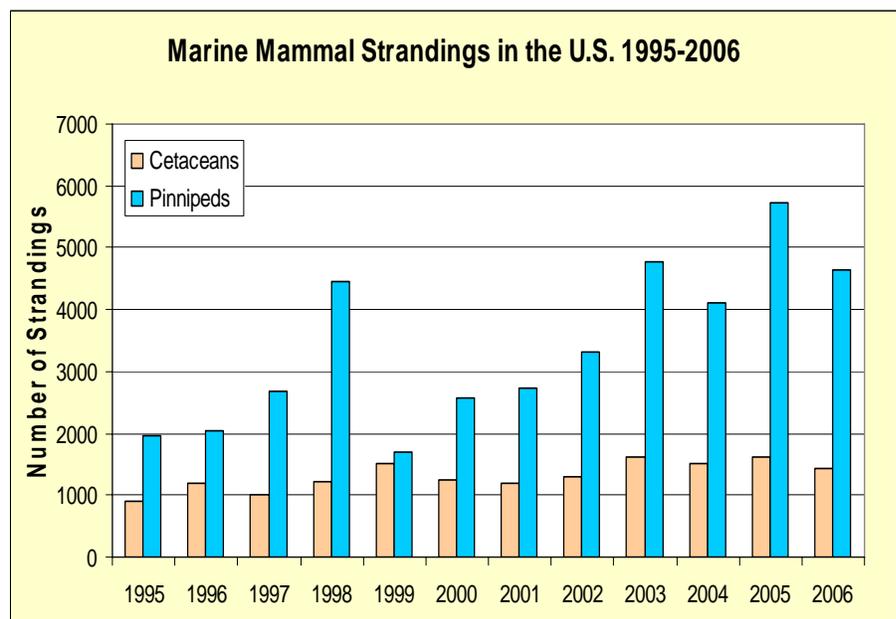


Mass strandings involve more than two cetaceans (excluding cow/calf pairs) stranding at the same time and place. Several causes have been determined or implicated, including, but not limited to, extreme weather events, tidal changes, disease of all or a single group member, or human-related events.

Why do marine mammals strand?

In many stranding cases, the cause of stranding is unknown, but some identified causes include:

- infectious disease, including parasite infestation
- starvation (e.g., associated with El Niño events)
- pollution exposure
- trauma (e.g., injuries from ship strikes or fishery entanglements)
- sound (human-generated or natural)
- harmful algal blooms and associated biotoxins
- unusual weather or oceanographic events
- ingestion of marine debris



Who responds to marine mammal strandings?

The National Marine Mammal Stranding Network created under the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program consists of over 100 organizations partnered with NOAA Fisheries Service to investigate marine mammal strandings. These stranding networks are established in all coastal states and are authorized through Stranding Agreements from NOAA Fisheries Service regional offices. They consist of professionals and volunteers from nonprofit organizations, aquaria, universities, and state and local governments who are trained in stranding response, animal health, and disease. Through a National Coordinator and six regional coordinators, NOAA Fisheries Service oversees, coordinates, participates in, and authorizes the response activities and provides training to personnel.