



Marin Headlands · 1065 Fort Cronkhite · Sausalito, CA 94965
Tel. 415-289-SEAL · Fax 415-289-7333 · www.marinemammalcenter.org

Monterey Bay Operations – Moss Landing, CA
San Luis Obispo Operations – Morro Bay, CA
Anchor Bay Operations - Fort Bragg Operations. CA

For information or interviews contact:

Jessica Hsu – (415) 289-7367-- hsujj@tmmc.org
Shelbi Stoudt – (415) 289-0184 – stoudts@tmmc.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Marine Mammal Center Announces New Response Hotline in Morro Bay

Dial the Number and Remember to “Leave Seals Be”

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – February 23, 2006) The Marine Mammal Center announces a new dedicated response hotline number for residents of the San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay region. The new local number will serve both as a rescue response line and a general inquiry number for the public to call. The Center is also launching an awareness campaign directed at beachgoers not to disturb or pick up pups. The campaign - **Leave Seals Be** - consists of public service announcements and web outreach strongly encouraging people to leave seal pups alone. In 2005, The Center rescued nearly 50 percent as many harbor seal pups as compared to 2004. The Center has attributed many of those rescues to human interactions and illegal handling. The public can take action if they spot an ill or stranded pup on a beach by reporting it immediately to The Center’s new 24-hour hotline at **(805) 771-8300**.

During the months of March and April, these seemingly vulnerable pups may be spotted alone on a beach, but it is likely that their mothers are close by, foraging for food, and will return shortly. “If you see an ill pup, please call and report it to The Center,” urges Shelbi Stoudt, Stranding Manager at The Center. “We may monitor the pup for 24 hours or longer depending on the situation. This usually gives the mother enough time to return for the pup. If she doesn’t return, trained volunteers and staff will then safely rescue it.”

The interaction or handling of harbor seal pups frequently results in maternal separation, decreasing their chances of survival. It is illegal to pick up, handle or disturb marine mammals. To do so, is punishable by law under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and could result in heavy monetary fines and potential jail time.

If you come across a harbor seal pup or any marine mammal that appears to be in distress in southern Big Sur, Moonstone Drive in Cambria, Cayucos, and Shell Beach areas, please call The Center’s 24-hour hotline at **(805) 771-8300**.

What to do if you come across a harbor or elephant seal pup on a beach:

- Stay at least 50 feet from it. Its mother may be just around the corner.
- Keep other people and dogs away.
- Call The Marine Mammal Center’s 24-hour hotline at **(805) 771-8300**.

The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit hospital headquartered in Sausalito, California. Staff and volunteers are dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals, to research about their diseases and to public education about them and ocean health. Since 1975, more than 11,000 California sea lions, elephant seals, porpoises, and other marine life have been treated, rescued along 600 miles of coastline from Mendocino County to San Luis Obispo County. Staff and volunteers uniquely combine rehabilitation with scientific discovery and education programs to advance the understanding of marine mammal health, ocean health and conservation.

On the Web: www.marinemammalcenter.org

For media inquiries contact: Jessica Hsu at (415) 289-7367

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