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The Marine Mammal Center Prepares for Seal-Pup Rescues

A harbor seal pup's best chance for survival is with its mother, not with humans.

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – February 28, 2005) The Marine Mammal Center is preparing for the annual harbor seal pup season and it needs the public's help in safe guarding these beautiful animals. Each year, The Center, a rescue and rehabilitation hospital in Sausalito, responds to approximately 100 reports of stranded harbor seal pups during the months of March and April. Sadly, about 20 percent of those calls are in response to pups that have either been illegally picked up or harassed by the public. Under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, it is a crime to harass or injure marine mammals; to do so is punishable with heavy monetary fines and potential jail time.

The Center strongly encourages the public to leave harbor seal pups alone. Once picked up, it's difficult to find the harbor seal's mom and to return the pup back to her and the ocean. For a pup on the beach, its best chance of survival is to stay near its mother to be fed and to learn survival techniques. If you should come across a marine mammal on a beach in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, call The Center's 24-hour rescue hotline at (415) 289-SEAL. If you are in the greater Monterey or Santa Cruz areas, call (831) 633-6298.

"It's important for us to assess each call we receive by going out and observing the pup to see if the seal really needs our help," said Shelbi Stoudt, The Center's Stranding Manager. "Female harbor seals often leave their pups on the beach while they go out to forage for food. The pup may be just waiting on the beach for its mother to return; if this is the case, we'll observe it for 24 hours or even longer, before attempting a rescue. It's frustrating for us to respond to preventable strandings due to human interaction. We really ask the public to leave seals alone and instead, call us if they see one in trouble"

What to do if you come across a harbor seal 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 (415) 289-SEAL.

Celebrating its 30th year in 2005, The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit hospital dedicated to the rescue and release of ill and injured marine mammals, and to research about their health and diseases. Volunteers and staff have treated more than 10,000 California sea lions, elephant seals, porpoises, and other marine life. In fact, The Center treats more marine mammals than any other institution of its kind in the world, uniquely combining its rehabilitation program with scientific discovery and education programs to advance the understanding of marine mammal health, ocean health and conservation.

On the Web: www.marinemammalcenter.org