



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 media inquiries contact:

Jessica Hsu – (415) 289-7367 – hsuj@tmmc.org
Jim Oswald – (415) 289-7341 oswaldj@tmmc.org

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The Marine Mammal Center Says “Leave Seals Be”

The best way to help young seals, abandoned or ill along the Bay Area coast, is to call the experts

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – February 20, 2007) The Marine Mammal Center is asking coastal residents and visitors to help give harbor seal pups a chance at life by not picking them up or disturbing them. The **Leave Seals Be** public education campaign encourages people to leave abandoned or ill seal pups alone, and to take action by calling The Center’s 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL (7325)**.

Generally, when a harbor seal pup is alone on the shore, its mother is not far away. It is likely the mother is foraging for food for herself before returning to nurse her pup. Unfortunately, good intentioned beachgoers may think the seal pup is in trouble and immediately pick it up or put it back into the water, or worse, remove it. This action will not help the seal and decreases its chances of receiving the nutrient-rich milk it needs from its mother to grow and be healthy. It is also illegal and punishable by law to pick up, handle or disturb them under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

“We hope to increase harbor seal pup survival by decreasing the amount of human interaction with them,” said Shelbi Stoudt, Stranding Manager at The Center. “Every season, a large number of harbor seal pups we rescue have been separated from their mothers because they were illegally removed from beaches or were harassed.”

The Marine Mammal Center is studying infectious causes of reproductive failure in harbor seals. In addition to asking for the public’s help in reporting ill, injured or abandoned harbor seals, researchers at The Center also ask that the public report any dead seal pups they may see on a beach. The knowledge gained from studying those pups can be valuable for future generations of harbor seals.

If you come across a harbor seal pup or any marine mammal that appears to be in distress in the Bay Area, Point Reyes National Seashore, Bolinas, Moss Beach, Richmond, Sausalito, and Pescadero areas, please call The Marine Mammal Center’s 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL**. Once a seal pup is reported to The Center, trained volunteers and staff can be dispatched to monitor the animal. If it is determined necessary, they will safely rescue the animal and transport it to the hospital for medical attention.

What to do if you come across an ill or abandoned seal on a beach:

- Stay at least 50 feet away from it. Pup mothers may be just around the corner.
- Do not handle it and keep other people and dogs away.
- Call The Marine Mammal Center’s 24-hour response hotline at **(415) 289-SEAL**.

About The Marine Mammal Center:

Headquartered in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Sausalito, California, The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit veterinary hospital, research and educational center dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals – primarily elephant seals, harbor seals and California sea lions – and to the study of their health. Since 1975, The Center has accumulated a body of knowledge about marine mammal health from its patients. The Center shares this information with visiting researchers and in leading science journals. By educating the public about marine mammals, The Center hopes to foster ocean stewardship and conservation. The Center is supported almost entirely by public funds. **On the web:** www.marinemammalcenter.org

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