

May 23, 2002

LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF PEOPLE MAGAZINE

Dear Editor:

I am writing in response to the image which appeared in the May 27th issue of People magazine showing Dustin Hoffman attempting to pull a California sea lion back into the water. While well-intentioned, this action could have killed the animal. A stranded sea lion that does not willingly re-enter the water is most likely suffering from an illness or an injury or is simply in need of rest on land. Seals and sea lions are air-breathing mammals and actually require time on land to rest. Forcing these animals back into the water could be a death sentence.

Recently, there has been a harmful algal bloom off the southern California coast that is toxic. The toxin works its way up the food chain and is poisoning sea lions. Here at The Marine Mammal Center, we have been taking in animals that are affected by this toxin. The animal that Dustin was "rescuing" could have been suffering from the effects of this toxin. Symptoms include non-responsiveness and seizures.

We strongly urge you to help us get the message out that people who encounter stranded marine mammals--seals, sea lions, dolphins or whales-- should call their local marine mammal stranding center or the closest National Marine Fisheries Service office (the federal entity responsible for protecting marine mammals). Here in Northern and Central California, people should contact us, The Marine Mammal Center at 415.289.SEAL. Please encourage people to not take matters into their own hands. Not only could their actions be harmful to the animal--this one could have drowned if it was in fact severely affected by the toxin--but these animals can bite and endanger untrained rescuers.

Thank you for taking this into consideration and I look forward to your response.

Best regards,
Susan Andres
Director of Communications, Marketing & Membership

The Marine Mammal Center