



Marine Mammal Rescue and Research

The problem:

Cape Cod is one of only a few places in the world where multiple whales and dolphins frequently beach themselves. These mass stranding events require rapid response in order to save as many whales and dolphins as possible.

The phenomenon of mass strandings affects only cetaceans (dolphins and whales, infrequently porpoises). Mass strandings occur when two or more of these animals strand within the same general geographic region and within the same tidal cycle.

There are usually multiple factors that play a role in causing these events. The one constant thread among all mass strandings is that like humans, the species of whales and dolphins involved are highly social animals that depend upon the safety and resources of the group in order to survive. This group mentality that is so helpful to these animals at sea can unfortunately cause otherwise healthy animals to strand en masse when they are near shore. When one animal enters shallow water or strands, the entire group may follow.

Other factors that may contribute to a mass stranding include predator evasion, complex topography, tidal fluxes, extreme weather, geomagnetic anomalies, and sonar or other acoustic disturbances. Mass strandings of whales and dolphins have occurred on Cape Cod for hundreds of years, thus it is unlikely that the events in this region are the result of modern human activities.

Our solution:

IFAW's Marine Mammal Rescue and Research team of six, plus some 350 volunteers, respond to marine animals in crisis as

FAST FACTS ▶ In the last 10 years, IFAW's Marine Mammal Rescue and Research team has handled more than 2,500 live animals.

- ▶ Today, the team has a 53% release rate for live dolphin and whale strandings, one of the highest success rates in the world.
- ▶ Several factors seem to contribute to mass stranding events including:
 - ▶ social bonds among the animals leading a group to follow one animal to shore
 - ▶ the hook-shape of the land jutting out into the water, gently sloping beaches and convoluted estuarine systems
 - ▶ tidal fluctuations that are unfamiliar to the animals
 - ▶ extreme weather that may push animals toward the land
- ▶ IFAW responds to 600-800 reports of stranded whales, dolphins and seals every year.

firefighters respond to fires, 24 hours a day, seven days a week along the coast of Cape Cod to Rhode Island, representing approximately 700 miles of coastline. We are one of 14 organizations comprising the Northeast Regional Stranding Network, which ensures expert, rapid response along the entire coast from Maine to Virginia.

Each event is unique and requires a response tailored to the circumstances of that stranding in order to ensure the best outcome.

Because every second matters, getting “eyes and ears” on the ground rapidly gives IFAW a critical edge. When we receive a call on our Emergency Hotline, we immediately dispatch the nearest volunteer to assess the situation to relay key details back to staff so they can coordinate the most efficient and effective response.

Once on scene, the IFAW team conducts a health assessment using behavioral observations, physical examination, blood analysis, and other diagnostic veterinary techniques to evaluate the animal's health. Supportive care is provided to all animals to make them as comfortable as possible and increase their chances for survival.

Using specialized equipment to move the animals across the muddy flats, a team of staff and volunteers transports healthy animals into trailers which take the animals to key locations on the Cape for release into open water to reduce the possibility of re-stranding.

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