

Human Interaction Indicators

External examinations of live animals and carcasses should be undertaken with attention to details which may reveal exposure or interactions with humans and associated activities. The awareness of indicators of human interactions are important not only because these interactions may be relevant in determining or ruling out possible causes of a stranding or mortality, but may contribute to our knowledge of possible areas of conflict between humans and marine mammals and/or may provide information on the proximity of the animals to areas of human habitation, as little is known in regard to many marine mammal populations.

External signs of predation, injury, and conspecific interactions are often completely missed, misidentified, or misinterpreted and it is important that descriptions and observations are recorded including texture, color, smell, appearance, location and size of any areas of tissue damage, scarring, or markings. These observations allow for determination of conditions that are not normally found, as well as allow for normal baseline findings to be recognized in individuals and populations of animals.

While observations may not immediately reveal why an animal stranded, this documentation may later prove critical for understanding long term trends in marine mammal health, interactions with humans, and the ocean environment. Often, questions that have yet to be asked can be answered and tools that do not yet exist or cannot be afforded can be used later to further our knowledge, if this information is documented at the time of the initial examinations.