

Marine Protection & Environmental Conservation

Be Kind To Marine Life During This Boating Season

As the weather warms up and you enjoy Southwest Florida's coastal waters this boating season, Mote Marine Laboratory recommends that boaters follow Coast Guard-approved safe boating guidelines and use vigilance to avoid striking sea turtles, manatees and dolphins.

Please see below for tips for beachgoers and boaters.

Protect Sea Turtles On The Beach

All sea turtle species are threatened or endangered, and state and federal laws prohibit the taking, possession, disturbance, mutilation, destruction, molestation and harassment of marine turtles, nests or eggs. Florida state law states that any person who violates this law commits a third degree felony.

The official season for sea turtle nesting on the Gulf Coast of Florida begins May 1 and ends October 31, but nesting turtles may be here sooner or hatch later. Mote scientists monitor sea turtle nesting along 35 miles of beaches from Longboat Key through Venice.

Mote, a nonprofit research and education institution, the Sarasota Police Department, and Suncoast Charities for Children, a nonprofit organization that provides funding support to Suncoast Foundation for Handicapped Children, Inc. through events like the Sarasota Powerboat Grand Prix festival, would like to remind residents and visitors to help keep local waters and beaches safe for summer recreation and sea turtle nesting season.

“Florida has some of the most gorgeous beaches, and we encourage residents and visitors to enjoy these beaches and the beautiful water, especially during the summer holidays, but as we do so, we should keep in mind that our oceans are home to wondrous marine life. Abiding by coast-guard approved safe boating practices and following city or county sea turtle ordinances will help ensure the health and safety for all,” said Dr. Michael P. Crosby, President and CEO of Mote.

Keeping local waters and beaches safe will be especially important during the Memorial Day weekend, when local waters and beaches will be busy for the holiday, and the Sarasota Powerboat Grand Prix off Lido Beach, which is Saturday, July 2, and Sunday, July 3, 2016.

Watch Out for Dolphins, Manatees and Turtles at Sea

Dolphins give birth during late spring and summer. Dolphins do not, or cannot always get out of the way of approaching boats, and fatal collisions and serious injuries to dolphins occur in Sarasota Bay. The Bay's resident dolphins frequent shallow waters where they may be unable to dive below an approaching boat. Naïve newborn dolphins lack the skills and experience to avoid boats, and have to surface more frequently to breathe than do older dolphins. Most dolphin deaths and injuries from boat strikes have occurred in the weeks surrounding July 4.

Manatees are also on the move in the Bay for foraging and mating. People might observe mating herds – several manatees gathered as males vie to mate with a female.

If you observe a manatee mating herd, watch the manatees from at least 100 feet away. Coming any closer might disrupt the animals' natural mating behavior or put people into harm's way. Adult manatees typically weigh upwards of 1,000 pounds and people can be seriously injured.

Sea turtles are swimming just offshore to mate and females inhabit nearshore waters between nesting events before they come ashore to nest. So far this year, Mote's animal rescuers have responded to or received many distressed or deceased sea turtles, including several affected by human activity.

Tips for Boaters

- Follow Coast Guard-approved safe boating guidelines, comply with slow speed zone signs and use vigilance to avoid striking sea turtles, manatees and dolphins.
- Follow 10 simple dolphin-friendly viewing tips on how to enjoy your day on the water while helping to protect dolphins. Click here for a [PDF](#). These tips were made with dolphins in mind, but they're also great guidelines for the best ways to view all large marine animals.
- Wear polarized sunglasses to better see marine life in your path.
- Never feed marine wildlife. Click here to watch a PSA about why it's harmful and illegal to feed wild dolphins: www.dontfeedwilddolphins.org
- Be sure to stow trash and line when under way. Marine debris that accidentally blows overboard or out of a vehicle can become ingested by or entangled around marine life.

Emergency contacts

Within Sarasota or Manatee county waters, if you see an entangled, stranded or dead dolphin, whale or sea turtle, please call Mote's Stranding Investigations Program, a 24-hour response service, at 941-988-0212.

If you see an entangled, stranded or dead manatee anywhere in state waters or an entangled, stranded or dead dolphin, whale or sea turtle outside of Sarasota or Manatee counties please call the FWC Wildlife Alert hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922), #FWC, *FWC on your cellular phone or use VHF Channel 16 on your marine radio.