

Community Announcement
March 10, 2020

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Sanctuary reports vessel/whale collisions; ocean users urged to use care

At least nine instances of vessel/whale collisions have been reported since December in Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and nearby waters. Ocean users are asked to use caution when navigating shared waters.

Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. Thousands of humpback whales return to Hawaiian waters each year to breed, give birth, and nurse their young.

According to the sanctuary, most of the whales reported with injuries this season are young, including calves and sub-adults.

With recent reports of whales showing propeller injuries, ocean users are reminded to keep a safe distance from these annual residents of Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. Collisions with vessels are a risk to both the animals and humans.

Boaters are reminded to post a lookout at all times throughout the year, not just when whales are visiting our waters. An extra set of eyes scanning the waters ahead and to the side of a boat can prevent collisions with marine life, obstructions, divers and other vessels. Slower speeds may also reduce the risk of collisions with the animals.

Humpback whales are protected in Hawai'i. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when on the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, paddle boarders, windsurfers, swimmers and divers throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

"Even though we are halfway through the season, a good number of humpback whales are in the sanctuary and nearby waters," said Ed Lyman, Natural Resource Management Specialist for the sanctuary. "By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing the initial documentation and assessment on the animal, ocean users are the foundation of our conservation efforts."

If you come across an injured or entangled marine mammal, please maintain the required safe and legal distance, and call the NOAA Marine Mammal Hotline at 1-888-256-9840 immediately, or the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF channel 16. If reporting a suspected approach zone violation, please call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964. Additional guidelines and safety tips can be found at <https://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/>.

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