



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary
991 Marine Dr., The Presidio
San Francisco, CA 94129

Superintendent Statement from Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

RE: Shipping containers

December 15, 2015

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, on December 11, 2015, twelve containers were washed overboard from the M/V MANOA in heavy weather in or around NOAA's Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS). The Coast Guard is broadcasting a safety marine information advisory urging mariners to exercise caution while transiting the area.

The Coast Guard is responding to the incident and working with NOAA, the State of California, National Park Service and the City of San Francisco, among others, to ensure the containers are quickly and safely removed from the marine environment. The Coast Guard Command Center (415-399-7300) remains the best number to report potential sightings of these containers. Beach Watch volunteers, trained citizen-scientists who survey and document sanctuary resources, reported container sightings to the Coast Guard.

NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration is providing trajectory modeling, using wind and current information to predict the potential direction of the spilled containers. If modeling predicts landings on the GFNMS shoreline, then Beach Watch volunteers can be mobilized to evaluate resource impacts. NOAA has additional staff ready if any containers wash up in the sanctuary and damage resources.

While the containers are not reported to contain any hazardous materials, debris from the contents, such as Styrofoam and plastic packing materials pose hazards to marine and coastal wildlife through ingestion and entanglement. This incident is a reminder that while marine debris is an everyday problem, winter storms and ocean swells may increase the amount of debris entering the environment.

The sanctuary is also concerned about impacts from the containers on ocean and coastal bottom habitats within the sanctuary, including potential crushing and smothering of slow moving or non-mobile invertebrates such as corals, sponges, sea pens, urchins, and sea cucumbers. Containers that sink in rocky reef habitat can cause scarring and the physical removal of rock, thus removing shelter for reef species, including overfished rockfish. In the nearshore environment, these injuries can be more widespread due to wave action, causing these containers to roll across the rocky substrate.

Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary spans nearly 3,300 square miles of ocean and coastal waters from San Francisco north to Manchester Beach above Point Arena. The sanctuary is a globally significant, diverse, and productive marine ecosystem that supports an abundance of species including abundant wildlife and valuable fisheries including the largest breeding seabird rookery in the contiguous United States, and other species such as whales and white sharks.

Maria Brown, Superintendent
NOAA Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

<http://farallones.noaa.gov>

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