

# Jellyfish: People should never feel foolish for reporting a potential spill

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Instead, they found floating masses made up of millions of small purple and blue by-the-wind sailors, or *Velella velella*.

The reports came from credible people, experienced mariners familiar with the appearance and hazards of oil spills, said Coast Guard Lieutenant Commander John Titchen, chief of the incident management division for Sector Columbia River. He supervises the Coast Guard's pollution response efforts on the Columbia River, along the Oregon coast and along a portion of the Washington coast.

"Even to experienced mariners, it really has the properties of what we call emulsified oil," he said about the jellyfish in a phone interview Friday.

To mariners aboard a boat and Coast Guard responders hovering 500 feet up in a Jayhawk helicopter, the dark masses of *Velella* perfectly mimicked the appearance of oil on the water: they floated in long, narrow, wavy strands and even appeared to bubble and froth as they rode the swells.

Though the Coast Guard has seen this in the past, they have never had so many calls in a single year before.

## Oil or jelly?

Titchen estimates the Coast Guard Sector Columbia River responds to approximately 250 pollution hazard calls in a typical year.

In the previous five years, they have responded to only

eight calls where reported oil slicks turned out to be *Velella*. So this year's unusually high number of reports in a two-month period has acted as a sort of training ground.

Titchen said they quickly are learning what kind of questions to ask when a report comes in. For example: Can you smell diesel? The *Velella* have their own special aroma, a kind of fishy, briny stench.

Titchen said they also know now that they are more likely to encounter the *Velella* near headlands and jetties.

"We can put two and two together," he said.

Still, oil spills are serious. Even if the "oil slick" just turns out to be jellyfish, people should never feel foolish for calling the Coast Guard to report a potential spill, he said.

"Certainly what we don't want to do is have people jump to the conclusion, 'Oh, I'm just seeing jellyfish, so I won't call the Coast Guard,'" Titchen said. "Very experienced mariners are reporting these."

## Big year, but common occurrence

Piles of dead or dying by-the-wind sailors are a common sight on most Oregon and Washington beaches during spring, and even during winter.

Last year, people walking along Oregon and Washington beaches commented on the vast numbers of *Velella* carpeting the sand. By many accounts, this year was equally big.



Photographed from a helicopter flying at an elevation of about 500 feet, *Velella* or "by-the-wind-sailors" form such dense bands that they are routinely being mistaken for oil spills.

Courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard

The creatures glide along the top of the ocean using a stiff, clear, triangular sail that rises vertically from their body and catches the wind.

Though electric blue or even purple while alive, they quickly dry up and bleach white when driven onto land by wind and sea swells.

According to Oregon Sea Grant, the short-lived, quick-breeding creatures are easily overpowered by strong winds. Offshore and tropical storms can drive them toward the coast by the millions.

*Velella* thrive in warm and

warm-temperate waters in the open ocean and are found in oceans around the world. Though they are lumped in with the same group, Cnidaria, that includes jellyfish, coral and sea anemones, they are not closely related to the common moon jellyfish.

Researchers say the creatures thrive in the warmer waters associated with the build up to an El Niño year. NOAA's Climate Prediction Center declared a weak El Niño this March and predict strong El Niño conditions for later in the year.



LAURA MULLINNIEX-DAVIS photo

Small purple and blue by-the-wind sailors, or *Velella velella* have washed up on Oregon's North Coast and southwest Washington beaches in vast numbers in recent years, including this one.

# Body cams: '... Everybody behaves better when they are on camera'

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Ultimately, a judge would determine what is in the "public interest," which is a common legal balancing test applied to materials under Oregon's public records law.

But requests must be "reasonably tailored" to the approximate date and time of an incident, and the video must be edited to make all faces unrecognizable.

Oregon law bars agencies from disclosing photographs of officers without their consent, although agencies themselves can use them.

Rep. Lew Frederick, D-Portland, said the bill is not meant to single out police conduct.

"It's also because everybody behaves better when they are on camera," said Frederick, a former television reporter and

the only black member of the House.

"What has been shown in communities across the country where these devices have been used is that both complaints and the types of incidents that lead to complaints are reduced."

The House also passed a companion bill that makes it clear it is legal for people to record a conversation with a police officer performing official

duties in a public place.

"It does not give permission to anyone to interfere with police work," said Frederick, the bill's chief sponsor. "It only allows people to record a conversation that they are already permitted to hear."

While Oregon law already allows film or video of such encounters, the bill allows an exception to a longstanding ban under which a third party

cannot record a conversation without consent of either participant. Already exempted from that ban are recordings made at public meetings.

Police have raised questions about whether the bill would allow others to eavesdrop on undercover operations or interviews with witnesses.

Rep. Jeff Barker, D-Aloha, said the bill's language would be further changed in the Sen-

ate to foreclose those possibilities.

"We just need to straighten out this little piece of the law so that it's all legal," said Barker, a retired Portland police lieutenant.

House Bill 2704 moved to the Senate on a 51-8 vote.

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