

Sea lions: Found shell casings are still a mystery

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Reports have been coming in from people finding dead sea lions on the beach and along the Astoria waterfront, some with possible bullet wounds. The Sea Lion Defense Brigade, which for years has monitored sea lions from Astoria to Bonneville Dam, reported finding 11 shell casings from a .44-caliber weapon at the basin last week, along with a sea lion with a serious eye wound.

The finding comes more than a month after the group reported finding 19 casings from a .306-caliber weapon at the basin. After the discovery, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Law Enforcement in Portland launched an investigation.

The discoveries are somewhat of a mystery. Sean Stanley, a federal officer with NOAA who confirmed in April his office had opened an investigation, would neither confirm nor deny the most recent discovery of shell casings. Meanwhile, there were no reports of gunfire to the police around either time the Sea Lion Defense Brigade said it discovered shell casings.

The Port turned over security footage to investigators after the first discovery. Members of the brigade and other watchdogs have also asked for the footage, which the agency has so far declined to provide.

"They're surveillance tapes, and I don't want people to know what our capacity for surveillance is," Knight said, adding the light at the basin is not good enough for useful nighttime footage. "We talked to our lawyers, and it's excluded from public records."

Knight said the basin is not the place for sea lions to live, with health and safety issues from the high concentration of them in close proximity to people. Evert has said the natural environment for sea lions is the rock breakwaters surrounding the basin. Letting them live on docks, he added, is akin to domesticating them.

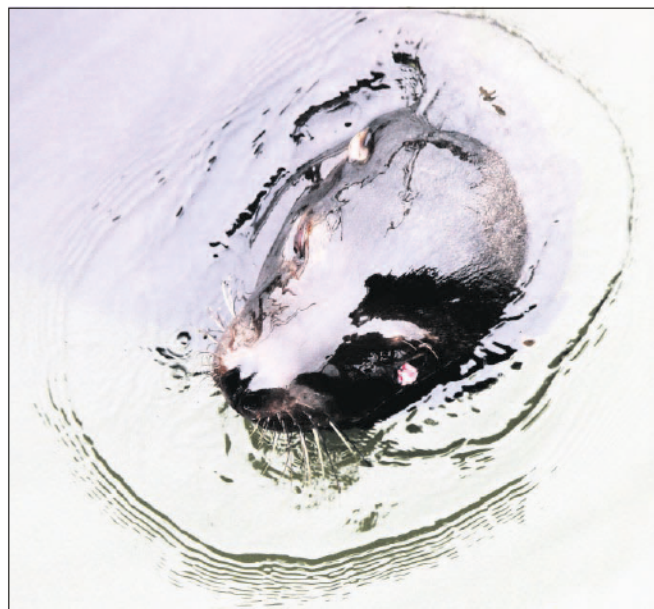
Knight said he has talked with Veronica Montoya, a member of the brigade who said she has discovered (gun) shells and sea lions that look like they have been shot, about the Port's need to get sea lions off the docks.

Montoya, watching Tuesday as the Port laid out the beach balls, said she understands the agency's position. But she added the Port needs to do more to protect the animals, and people need to look beyond their hatred of sea lions to see their benefit.

"I guess if it works, it's OK; as long as it doesn't hurt the sea lions," Montoya said of the beach balls. "But I think that they should leave these animals alone, because they're such a huge draw."



The Sea Lion Defense Brigade reported finding 11 shell casings from a .44-caliber weapon May 18 at the Port of Astoria's East End Mooring Basin. The group reported finding 19 shell casings in early April as well, which launched an investigation into possible sea lion shootings by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



Sea Lion Defense Brigade volunteer Veronica Montoya reported finding 11 shell casings from a .44-caliber weapon May 18 at the Port of Astoria's East End Mooring Basin, along with a sea lion with a serious eye wound.

'I guess if it works, it's OK; as long as it doesn't hurt the sea lions.'

— Veronica Montoya

a member of The Sea Lion Defense Brigade



Sea lions cover a floating dock as Robert Evert, Jose Delgado and Michael Weston walk along a recently cleared dock of the East End Mooring Basin.

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