

## Feds seek clues in sea lion shootings in Astoria

By Edward Stratton  
EO Media Group

At least 10 California sea lions and one harbor seal have died from gunshot wounds and trauma in and around Astoria over the past two months, federal investigators have confirmed.

"It's all been along the waterfront in Astoria," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Law Enforcement Special Agent Karl Hellberg said, adding the death tally is a conservative estimate.

Hellberg reached out in the last few days to The Humane Society of the United States to offer a reward for information about the shootings. Thursday, May 28, The Humane Society offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the identification, arrest and conviction of anyone responsible for the shootings.

### Shell casings

On April 6, members of the Sea Lion Defense Brigade reported finding 19 bullet casings on the Port of Astoria's East End Mooring Basin causeway. On May 18, they reported finding 11 more shell casings at the basin. Hellberg said more were found near Buoy Beer Co. on Ninth Street.

He said the local wildlife stranding networks have been doing necropsies on the animals.

"We've been watching this and trying to investigate this as we can," he said, adding it is a difficult case because of the number of reports and the longstanding conflict between recreational and commercial fishermen and sea lions.

"I'm trying to develop additional leads right now,"

Hellberg said. "I've exhausted many leads already."

Since 1972, sea lions and harbor seals have been covered by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act. Shooting them is punishable by criminal penalties up to \$100,000 and one year in prison. Civil penalties of up to \$11,000 can also be assessed for each violation of the act.

The Humane Society and Hellberg are directing anyone with information concerning the shootings to call NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement in Astoria at 503-325-5934 or the NOAA Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964. Callers may remain anonymous.

### Why sea lions are here

The NOAA Northwest Fisheries Science Center recently reported on the increase of sea lions in the Columbia River and starvation in California.

Male sea lions, NOAA said, seek out high-energy, oily fish such as herring and sardines. In recent years, they've come in increasing numbers to the mouth of the Columbia River to feed on strong runs of smelt, taking up residence on docks and jetties near Astoria.

Their numbers locally can range from a few hundred to more than 2,000, depending on the fish runs. As the smelt run dissipates and male sea lions migrate to rookeries in Southern California, there are fewer in the river.

A die-off of sardines, a traditional food source of sea lions in California, coincides with large recent die-offs and strandings of sea lions along the California coastline, NOAA reported.

# Sexting dangers on the rise

By Kyle Spurr  
EO Media Group

**S**ending sexually explicit text messages, known as sexting, can be regrettable enough, but local law enforcement officials are saying sexting cases are turning criminal.

The most common cases are children — high-schoolers down to even elementary school kids — communicating with people they do not know or children sending pictures to friends, who then spread them around to others.

Clatsop County Deputy District Attorney Dawn Buzzard said law enforcement officials are seeing more of these cases becoming criminal by one person extorting the other or asking to meet, which has led to rape and sodomy charges.

"I don't think our community understands how prevalent this is," Buzzard said.

Sexting cases often begin through the slew of social media applications such as Instagram, Snapchat, Kik, Facebook, Tinder, Grindr and Tumblr. From there, Buzzard said, the person seeking the sexually explicit messages asks multiple people in hopes of connecting with a few.

Once in conversation, Buzzard said, the person may feed off of the other's insecurities, using the insecurity to their advantage. The suspect reassures the person they are attractive or says whatever imperfection they have is actually a turn on.

Sometimes the suspect threatens to harm themselves if the person doesn't send a sext. Other times, the person threatens to share sexts if they don't receive more.

"Sending the picture is the first step in making yourself vulnerable," Buzzard said.

### Charges filed

Oregon state laws have evolved in recent years to address the influence of technology in criminal cases. The state has added new charges such as online sexual corruption and luring a minor.

According to the Clatsop County District Attorney's Office data between Jan. 1, 2010, and Jan. 1, 2015, the office filed 14 charges of online sexual corruption and 43 charges of use of a child in a sexually explicit display — more commonly related to sexting.

In that same timeframe, the District Attorney's Office filed three charges of luring a child.

If the numbers seem low, Buzzard said, it is because many other cases that stem from sexting regularly result in more serious sex abuse charges.

According to the five-year data, the District Attorney's Office filed 581 first-degree sex abuse charges. Most suspects are charged multiple times, so the number of suspects is likely still more than 100.

### Recent case

The dangers of communicating online with an unknown person came to light earlier this month, when a 14-year-old California girl thought she was messaging an 18-year-old boy on Instagram, only to find out it was actually a 48-year-old man from Everett, Wash., who later allegedly kidnapped and raped her.

The suspect, Russell Wayne Deviney, was caught outside Cannon Beach after dropping the girl off in Astoria. The girl told investigators she became upset with her mother and shared her feelings with Deviney, who was posing as a teenager. He suggested they go on a one-day vacation, and the girl snuck out that night with her overnight bag to meet him.

Deputy District Attorney Ron Brown said the girl and her mother seemed to have a good relationship.

"It was a situation where you sort of expect the mother to be right on top of it, but in this day and age, it's practically impossible," Brown said.

The District Attorney's Office along with local police departments and area schools meet once per month as part of the Clatsop County Multidisciplinary Child Abuse Crime Team. During the monthly meetings, sexting is frequently brought up.

Schools have revisited and updated their policies for cellphone use, as a way to avoid distractions in class, but also as a way to help deter sexting.

Buzzard said representatives from the schools talk at the multidisciplinary team meetings about how sexting has become an issue.

"They genuinely care about these kids and ask 'how do we stop this?'," Buzzard said.

### Tips for parents

The responsibility for keeping children out of situations that can escalate



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX / EO MEDIA GROUP

into criminal cases falls on the parents or guardians, according to law enforcement officials.

Clatsop County Sheriff's Office Detective Ryan Humphrey said parents need to be involved with their children's cellphone and online activity and children do not need privacy online.

Humphrey said simple tips for parents and guardians are to keep an open dialog, know your child's friends, keep computers in a common area, know what applications are out there. If a parent or guardian does not know the technology, have their child show them, Humphrey said.

Parents and guardians need to ask, "Does it make sense?" who their child is communicating with on their phones or other online devices, which can include an Xbox, Wii, e-reader or tablets.

"The Sheriff's Office does not want to tell people how to raise their kids, but kids who have privacy online are probably comprising their own privacy online," Humphrey said.

Brown said the modern dangers of sexting and online communication do not make today's adolescents different from any other generation. Chatting online with an unknown person or sending a sexually explicit message can be just as risky as past generations putting out their thumbs to hitchhike.

Brown said children, in any generation, rarely think about the consequences. If a child had to walk around and hand people copies of their sexually explicit pictures, that would likely change their perspective, Brown said.

"Instead of thinking what is the worst possible scenario that could result from this picture, they are not thinking about the long-term or short-term implications," Brown said.

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