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Sea Lions Sickened By Toxic Algae Left On Beaches

(CBS) LOS ANGELES The current outbreak of toxic algae off the Los Angeles Harbor is the most virulent on record, leaving animal rehabilitation centers so overburdened that some sick sea lions are temporarily left to fend for themselves at local beaches, it was reported Thursday.

"We just don't have the space to accommodate them all," Lauren Palmer, staff veterinarian at San Pedro's Marine Mammal Care Center told *The Times*. The center is crammed with seals and sea lions that have suffered convulsions brought on by the algae's powerful neurotoxin.

The decision to leave sea lions on the beach for 48 hours has posed problems for police, lifeguards and wildlife rescue workers trying keep a well-meaning public away from sea lions that have beached themselves after suffering epileptic seizures and brain damage, *The Times* reported.

If the animals don't die or swim away after two days, they are brought to a rehab center.

Peter Wallerstein, who rescues sea lions and other marine mammals for the Whale Rescue Team, has filed a protest with federal officials over the policy that keeps sea lions on the beach for 48 hours, saying it is inhumane, according to *The Times*.

He agreed with authorities that beachgoers should avoid contact with sea lions, whose sharp teeth are designed for grabbing fish and ripping flesh.

California sea lions, dolphins, porpoises, sea otters, pelicans, cormorants and other seabirds pick up the neurotoxin known as domoic acid by eating anchovies, sardines or

shellfish that consume the algae that produce it.

The accumulation of the toxin in shellfish has prompted health authorities to warn the public not to collect and eat mussels, clams or other shellfish from Southern California waters. Commercial catches are deemed safe.

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