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After Finding Three Green Sea Turtles Dead Within Two Weeks in St. Croix Waters, DPNR Calls on Boating Community to be Mindful of Surroundings

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Green sea turtle swimming underwater. By. GETTY IMAGES

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources is strongly advising the boating community to operate their vessels in a safe and responsible manner. DPNR said that within the last two weeks, three green sea turtles were found dead along the northeastern shoreline of St. Croix. These turtles sustained fracture wounds to their shells consistent with boat strike interactions, according to the local agency.

“DPNR reminds the community that sea turtles are air-breathing reptiles that must regularly swim to the surface to breathe. At these times, sea turtles are very vulnerable to boat traffic and can be seriously injured or killed if hit by the hull or propeller of a boat,” said DPNR Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol.

DPNR encouraged the boating community to help protect sea turtles throughout the territory by following these recommendations:

- Always operate boats at safe and responsible speeds especially when traveling close to any shoreline, coral reef, or sea grass bed. Respect “no wake” regulations in all designated anchoring and mooring areas (<6 knots speed) and other posted areas.
- When possible, stay in deep water channels while boating. Proceed carefully while boating over sea grass beds and coral reefs where sea turtles might be feeding. However, be aware that sea turtles also use deep water channels when traveling.
- Stay alert and avoid sea turtles which are swimming, basking, or mating on the surface. Consider having a skipper on the bow be on the lookout for a head, shell or flipper breaking the surface. As a turtle dives down a swirl or flat spot can often be seen on the surface. If spotted, slow immediately, but safely, to allow the turtle to depart the surface.
- If you see a sea turtle when operating a powerboat, remain a safe distance away -- 50 feet is the suggested minimum.

According to DPNR, if you encounter a sick, injured, imperiled, or dead sea turtle call the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue (STAR) Network: 340-690-0474. Green Sea Turtles are listed as Federally Threatened in the Territory.

All sea turtles are indigenous to the Virgin Islands and protected under territorial laws 12 VIC § 105 and 12 VIC § 318. Any persons found to have injured a sea turtle are subject to a penalty no less than \$100 pursuant to 12 VIC § 107 and 12 VIC § 325. For more information on the species, and other turtle species in the territory, please visit <https://dpr.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/facts/>