

20-foot Humpback whale washes ashore in Rhode Island on Sunday

A 20-foot Humpback whale washed ashore at the Charlestown Breachway in Rhode Island on Sunday. The following statement and photos were posted to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Facebook page:

"The Marine Mammal Protection Act (1973) helps protects some of our most vulnerable animals, alive or dead. Through this law, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) coordinates a network of organizations including Mystic Aquarium to respond to stranded or beached whales, dolphins, or porpoises so, in the right circumstances, a necropsy can be conducted. (A necropsy is an autopsy performed on an animal.) Whales are majestic. Although the death of the 20-foot, juvenile humpback that washed ashore at the Charlestown Breachway is sad, because its carcass was remarkably intact, it represented an ideal opportunity – through a necropsy – to advance scientific knowledge about how whales live and die, and about the ocean's health and stability.

To the question, "How do you move a 40,000-pound dead whale?" the answer is "not easily." Employees from DEM's Marine Fisheries, Parks + Recreation, and Law Enforcement divisions have been proud to partner with the team from Mystic Aquarium on responding to this situation. When the necropsy is finished, DEM's crew will move the carcass higher up the beach and bury it in a 15-foot hole it has dug. We hope to accomplish this by sundown. We appreciate the public's interest in this unusual event"