

10 & 11 Caledonia Avenue, Kingston 5, Jamaica W.I.; Tel: (876) 754-7540-3; Fax: (876) 754-7595-6; Toll Free: 888-991-5005
E-mail: ceo@nepa.gov.jm, Website: www.nepa.gov.jm

Attention: All News Editors

KINGSTON, Jamaica

(11 February 2025):

STAY ALERT! NEPA WARNS OF PORTUGUESE MAN O' WAR SIGHTINGS ALONG COASTAL AREAS

The National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) is advising the public to exercise caution when visiting coastal areas across the island, following reports of Portuguese man o' war (*Physalia physalis*) washing ashore in parts of Portland. Beachgoers and individuals engaged in coastal activities are urged to remain vigilant, as the Portuguese man o' war can still sting even after it is dead, due to a reflex action of its tentacles.

Often mistaken for jellyfish, the Portuguese man o' war is a siphonophore—a specialized colony of zooids that function together as a single organism. It is easily identified by its balloon-like float, which is typically blue, violet, or pink and rises up to six inches above the waterline. Beneath the float, long tentacles and polyps can grow to an average length of 10 meters (about 30 feet), with some reaching up to 30 meters (about 100 feet).

The tentacles of the Portuguese man o' war are equipped with stinging nematocysts, microscopic capsules containing coiled, barbed tubes that deliver venom. This venom is powerful enough to paralyze and kill small fish and crustaceans. While stings are rarely fatal to humans, they can cause intense pain, welts, and irritation that may last one to three hours.

Portuguese man o' war are typically found in tropical and subtropical seas. They are transported by ocean currents and winds and often travel in groups, sometimes forming colonies of 1,000 or more.

NEPA advises the public to take the following precautions:

- Avoid touching the Portuguese man o' war, whether it is in the water or washed ashore.
- Wear protective footwear when walking along coastal areas.
- If stung, rinse the affected area with seawater and remove tentacle remnants carefully using a pair of tweezers. Do not rub the area, as this can worsen the reaction. Seek medical attention if symptoms persist or worsen.
- In the sea, swimmers should not approach them as the trailing stingers can be as much as 20 to 30 feet away from the float at the sea surface.

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Any reply or subsequent reference to this communication should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, to the attention of the officer dealing with the matter, and the reference quoted where applicable.

For further information please contact NEPA at:

**Public Education and Corporate Communication Branch,
National Environment and Planning Agency**
Tel: 876-754-7540; ext. 2751
Email: angela.hamilton@nepa.gov.jm; Website: www.nepa.gov.jm



Figure 1: Portuguese Man-of-War observed in sargassum (contributed)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

References

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