



TOWN OF CHATHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

SHARK SIGHTING AND SHARK ATTACK POLICY

POLICY

The Town of Chatham is committed to providing a safe environment for swimmers and boaters on our beaches and swimming areas. The Town will be sensitive and accommodating toward the public who want to make full use of all that the town has to offer in this beachside community, using the necessary amount of caution that is prudent. It is understood that sharks and their behavior are unpredictable and the Town cannot guarantee safety to all who choose to enter our waters. The Town will provide a reasonable and effective set of safety procedures that will fully evaluate reports or information of dangers from sharks, notify all pertinent individuals and groups and take action to ensure the safety of the public. In the event of a marine life attack on a person on Chatham beaches or waterways, the highest priority shall be given in taking extreme precautions to safeguard the public. All Town divisions and departments shall work cooperatively and provide support and assistance to each other to achieve the overall goal of safety for our citizens.

DEFINITIONS

- 1) Unconfirmed Sighting - is a sighting made by a citizen or other individual that has not received some level of training or does not have significant experience with marine life, or cannot be verified in some way as credible.
- 2) Confirmed Sighting – is a sighting that is a visual by a lifeguard, trained Town staff, public safety official, sightings made by multiple persons, or other highly credible sources. It may also be any sighting that based on the information and evaluation is deemed to have a high level of credibility.
- 3) Shark Activity Notification List – is a pre-determined comprehensive list of persons, groups or organizations that shall be alerted upon a sighting or report of shark activity.

- 4) Shark Activity Alert – is an immediate notification from the Chatham Police Dispatch to the members on the Shark Sighting Notification List regarding shark sightings, shark activity or shark attack(s).
- 5) Chatham Police Dispatch – is the central point of communications for the Town when receiving shark sighting/attack information and performing Shark Activity Alerts and Radio Dispatch Alerts.
- 6) Radio Dispatch Alert – is a dispatch radio alert to all Town of Chatham Public Safety and Town Beach Staff radio channels communicating a Confirmed Sighting and notification if any swimming areas have been closed.
- 7) Chatham Shark Sighting Questionnaire – is a report form providing detailed information that documents a shark sighting or significant activity.

PROCEDURES

I. PROCEDURE FOR RECEIVING A REPORT OF A SHARK SIGHTING

1. The Town staff member that first receives information of a sighting shall gather as many facts as possible regarding the observation, especially the location, the time, and what was observed.
2. The Town staff member shall then immediately make notification to the Chatham Police Dispatch for a Shark Sighting Activity Alert.
3. The sighting information shall be evaluated by the Town Beach Staff and/or the Director of Park and Recreation to determine if the sighting was a Confirmed Sighting, or an Unconfirmed Sighting. The Beach Staff and Director shall:
 - a. Assess the information and determine if there is a good probability that the animal is a shark or not. Be aware that common animals “presenting” as sharks may be small whales, porpoises, sunfish, seals, and ducks.
 - b. Determine location, and type of movement.
 - c. Assess how far the animal is from the shore and to the closest swimming area and which direction it is traveling.

4. Town staff from the Harbormaster, Police and Beach Staff shall be on alert and attempt to observe the area(s) indicated in the initial report.
5. If the sighting is determined to be a Confirmed Sighting, but not in close proximity to a Town swimming beach, then no beach closures will be necessary.
6. If the Confirmed Sighting is at or close to a swimming beach area then procedures shall be followed for immediate closure of the affected swimming area to all swimmers by applicable Town Staff until further notice as determined by Town Officials.

II. PROCEDURE FOR OBSERVED OR CONFIRMED SIGHTING AT TOWN BEACHES BY TOWN STAFF

1. Upon direct observation of a Confirmed Sighting at or in close proximity to a swimming beach, the Town Beach Staff shall immediately begin the procedure for Initiating Closure of the affected swimming area.
2. After Initiating Beach Closure and all swimmers are safely out of the water, immediately make notification to Chatham Police Dispatch for shark and radio alert notifications.

III. PROCEDURE FOR INITIATING CLOSURE AND REOPENING OF A TOWN BEACH

1. The following action steps shall take place upon the closure a Town swimming beach:
 - a. Signal or communicate to all beach patrol or lifeguards to have all swimmers exit the water immediately.
 - b. Ensure that all swimmers have exited the water safely and check beach area for potential victims.
 - c. The Town staff member shall then immediately make notification to the Chatham Police Dispatch for a Shark Sighting Activity Alert and Radio Dispatch Alert.
 - d. If the Designated Swimming Area is closed to swimming due to a shark sighting, all patrons entering the parking lot shall be warned that swimming is prohibited until further notice due to a shark sighting.

- e. Appoint at least one beach patrol member or lifeguard with binoculars to serve as a “spotter” to track the shark as best as can be done.
 - f. Harbormaster Patrol to respond with patrol boat(s) off the protected beach to warn persons of the sighting.
 - g. Contact all other Town beach staff with information of the location, movement and direction.
2. Reopening of Swimming Beaches: The affected beach shall remain closed until further notice, and shall reopen when Town Officials so designate.

IV. PROCEDURE FOR A SHARK ATTACK INCIDENT

1. Confirmed or Observed by Lifeguards or other Town staff
 - a. Call 911 and notify Fire / Rescue Department and Harbormaster Department for shore and marine response.
 - b. Fire Dispatcher or Police Dispatcher receiving the 911 call shall make a Radio Dispatch Alert of the incident.
 - c. Initiate immediate closure of the affected area for swimming.
 - d. Be prepared to treat victim for massive hemorrhaging and shock.
 - e. Beach will remain closed for the remainder of the day. Beach will re-open only at the determination of Town Public Safety officials.
2. General Unconfirmed or Unobserved Reports to Town Staff
 - a. Call 911 and initiate normal water rescue response procedures by public safety personnel.
 - b. When determination is made that a shark is responsible for the injuries, begin removal of all swimmers and rescuers out of the water immediately and initiate beach closure guidelines as described in Procedure III above.

V. PROCEDURE FOR RECLASSIFYING UNCONFIRMED SIGHTING TO CONFIRMED SIGHTING

1. Considerations for reclassifying to a Confirmed Sighting:

- a. Based upon interviews with the reporting party
 - b. Additional reports of sightings
 - c. Upon examining photographs, video or other evidence.
2. If the sighting based upon new or additional information is reclassified to a Confirmed Sighting, the Park and Recreation Director and Beach Supervisor shall initiate the applicable procedures listed above for notification and action steps.

VI. PROCEDURE FOR CHATHAM SHARK SIGHTING QUESTIONNAIRE DOCUMENTATION

1. Any sighting whether confirmed or unconfirmed, or any shark attack shall be fully documented on a Chatham Shark Sighting Questionnaire by the Town staff member who receives the initial report.
2. The Park and Recreation Director shall ensure that the form is complete and thorough as is possible.
3. The Park and Recreation Director shall circulate copies of the questionnaire to applicable Town Staff and other groups, individuals or agencies as determined by the Town Manager.

VII. PROCEDURE FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION RELEASES, NEWS CONFERENCES AND NEWS INTERVIEWS

1. The Town Manager shall designate a Public Information Officer (PIO) to respond to media inquiries, provide public information and conduct news releases and news conferences as needed regarding shark sightings, beach closures due to shark activity, or shark attacks.
2. Any and all media inquiries regarding shark sightings, shark attacks or shark activity received by Town staff shall require a direct notification to the appropriate division or department head and that department shall be responsible for immediately conveying the inquiry directly to the PIO.

3. Town staff shall provide the PIO with the information of the media inquiry such as the nature of the inquiry, the specific requests for information, as well as the contact information and name of the news agency making the inquiry.
4. Town staff shall assist the PIO with information and support as needed.
5. The PIO shall consult with the Town Manager on media/news incidents.