

Coast Guard tracks mysterious canisters found on ocean beaches

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) and Coast Guard were at Ocean Shores, Wash., Thursday trying to track down the location of mysterious one-liter canisters that have been showing up on shorelines.

Mysterious canisters appear on ocean beaches - USCG photo According to reports from local residents, these silver-colored containers with red or white plastic caps have been spotted on the beaches since last fall, but no one reported them to the agencies until this week. Calls received indicate they've been located as far north as La Push, Wash., south to Ocean Park.

Ecology collected two canisters Wednesday. Tests confirmed the presence of a small amount of phosphine gas -- a product of aluminum phosphide - which is used to kill rodents and other pests aboard cargo ships.

When aluminum phosphide is exposed to air, it becomes a toxic gas. If exposed to water, it changes to a more benign chemical compound similar to baking soda.

So far, all of the canisters that have been found appear to be empty. But Ecology and Coast Guard caution people to leave the canisters in place and keep children and pets away. People who see or have picked up canisters are asked to report their find to Ecology by calling 360-407-6300.

The Coast Guard plans to scan the beaches from Ocean Shores north to Ozette, Wash., over the next couple of days. Ecology will arrange to pick up any canisters reported by citizens.

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