

Palm oil on beaches

Over recent years there have been a number of incidents where deposits of a substance believed to be palm oil have washed up on beaches in the South West.

Palm oil is a natural edible vegetable oil that is commonly used in food processing. Palm oil production can be linked to a number of environmental issues but it can create a secondary issue if released into the marine environment.

Palm oil can get into the marine environment when it is legally released at sea by ships. Whilst on the ships, and whilst in the sea, palm oil can become contaminated with other waste products and because it is edible it can be attractive to some animals who can become ill after coming into contact with it.

Palm oil can be observed in a variety of forms and it is important to keep your eyes open for it, especially if you are exercising your dog on a beach. It is sometimes seen as a scattering of pebble-sized lumps that are white and waxy in appearance. It can also sometimes be seen in small pea-sized pieces that can dominate the strandline.

Laboratory testing has shown that this substance is a non-toxic, degraded edible oil or fat. However, there have been reports of dogs becoming seriously ill after ingesting the substance. Some dogs that have consumed small quantities of palm oil have suffered from vomiting and diarrhoea, which has led to severe dehydration. Some dogs that have eaten larger amounts of the substance have suffered a range of effects including kidney damage, liver failure and blockages of the gut. In some instances this has resulted in the dog needing to be put down.

So, if you're heading to the beach please look out for palm oil. Although the substance has been described as non-toxic, given the reports about dogs becoming ill, it is suggested that children and pets should be kept away from the deposits. If you come into contact with the substance, wash it off with soap or shower gel and wash your clothes.

If you believe your dog has been in contact with the substance and are concerned about their health, please contact your vet as soon as possible.



Palm oil is sometimes seen as a scattering of white and waxy pebble-sized lumps. It can also be seen in small pea-sized pieces on the strandline.

Photo: Cornwall Council

BeachWise is a coastal community partnership formed to promote the safe enjoyment of our region's beautiful beaches and clean bathing waters. For more information see www.beachwise.uk