

Potentially Harmful Canisters a Concern on Kodiak Beaches

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

A series of aluminum canisters have been washing up on the shores of Southeast Alaska, and more recently in the Kodiak Archipelago. Two were discovered on Afognak Island earlier this month and last week another was found on Queer Island, near Kalsin Bay. KMXT's Brianna Gibbs has more.

The canisters contain a compound with the trade name phostoxin (foss-toxin), which when exposed to the moisture in the air creates phosphine gas.

"Which is highly toxic and poisonous and leads to, well, death," said Tom Pogson, the director of marine programs for Island Trails Network in Kodiak. He has been monitoring the reports of the canisters throughout Alaska. He said there have only been a handful, but it's still concerning as more and more citizens take to the beaches to help with marine debris clean ups.

A spokesperson for the Washington State Department of Ecology, Curt Hart, said the canisters were big problem in Washington state three years ago.

-- (Phostoxin 2 :27 “If they're the same canisters that we have received on our beaches in years past, these are insecticides. And the common use for these canisters is they're filled with a powder insecticide. Applicators pour them in a cloth sock and they put them in the hulls of grain ships that are headed for, typically for Asia. And it's to keep insects from eating the raw foodstuff inside.”)

Hart

said the canisters aren't a problem if they're found with the lids off, and can be safely collected and thrown away.

-- (Phostoxin 3 :24 "If the canisters still have the lid on, we recommend they not take the lid off, because there could be residue. And the residue is potentially harmful to human health. And to move them out of the beach area (and this is what we do in our state) give our agency a call. Let us know where they're located and then we'll either go out and pick them up or work with local authorities who will go out and pick them up.")

In Alaska, the contact agency would be the Department of Environmental Conservation, which is currently tracking and handling hazardous waste on shorelines throughout the state.

Hart

said the canisters were washing up by the dozens in Washington, which is why the state made a concerted effort to work with the ports and grain terminals to make sure the canisters were being properly disposed of. Signage went up on beaches, and educational material was sent out to coastal towns so beach-goers knew what to do if they saw a canister. Since then, he said very few have washed up on the state's beaches, and no injuries were reported.

As

for Alaska, neither Hart nor Pogson are exactly sure where the canisters are coming from. The numbers aren't alarming, but both agreed it's still important for folks to be aware.

In

Kodiak, I'm Brianna Gibbs.