

## **OIL SPILL EVENT**

### **Instructions for Completing a Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN) Report Form**

#### **Observer's Name / Address / Phone:**

This is the person who handled and collected data on the turtle in the field. Please include your full name with middle initial if you have one. Please give a complete address and phone number where you can be reached in case we need to contact you for clarification of the report. Include an email address if available.

#### **Stranding Date:**

This is the date the turtle was first encountered. If you did not investigate and document the turtle until a later date, please note that on the form. Turtle number by day is used to keep track of the number of turtles any individual STSSN participant documents on a single day – your first turtle of the day is 01, second of the same day is 02, etc. Time is the time you saw the turtle on the beach or in the water.

#### **Species:**

Refer to the Sea Turtle Identification Key (ID placard) to determine species based on characteristics detailed on ID placard. Whenever possible, take photos of the stranding – straight down dorsal, ventral and head shots are most useful; if the turtle is entangled or has any injuries, take photos to document those anomalies. If you are unsure of species ID, take several photos from different angles and try to salvage the carcass and contact your state coordinator for assistance in species identification.

#### **Stranding Location:**

If the turtle was found along a Gulf of Mexico or Atlantic Ocean beach or in the water, check "Offshore"; if the turtle was found landward of an Atlantic or Gulf beach, inside a bay, pass, inlet, lagoon, river, harbor, bayou, etc., check "Inshore". Describe the specific location where the turtle was found using major reference points that can be found on maps or nautical charts. Do not use local landmarks that cannot easily be found on maps. Good reference points include: inlets, lighthouses, county or state lines, roads that intersect the beach, park boundaries, etc. If the location is obscure, or difficult to describe, include a map with the stranding location marked when you submit the stranding report form. If the turtle was found floating, please clearly indicate this on the stranding report form. If you use a GPS unit to determine the latitude and longitude of a stranding please indicate this.

#### **Condition of Turtle:**

Check the code that best describes the stranded turtle. If the stranding seems intermediate between two codes, pick the one that fits best.

Alive: Eye blink response; breathing (breaths may be several minutes apart); may or may not be active / moving around.

Fresh dead: Should initially question whether it is alive; may have rigor mortis; eyes should be clear; no smell of decomposition; no evidence of bloating. If the turtle smells at all or is bloated, it is not fresh dead!

Moderately decomposed: Mild to moderate smell of decomposition; mild to moderate bloat; bulging eyes, if present; soft tissue may feel spongy; scutes and skin may be beginning to slough.

Severely decomposed: Foul smell; severe bloat or mass of rotting flesh if already de-gassed; scutes and skin sloughing, or missing; bony structures may be disarticulating .

Dried Carcass: Completely desiccated, only dry skin and bones; little to no smell.

Skeleton, bones only: Bones only with no soft tissue remaining.

#### **Final Disposition:**

**ALL TURTLE STRANDINGS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED OIL SPILL RESPONSE AREA  
NEED TO BE SALVAGED FOR FUTURE NECROPSY / ANALYSIS. CONTACT YOUR STATE  
COORDINATOR FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

Check the code that best describes what you did with the stranded turtle. To avoid duplicate reports being received on the same turtle, try to never leave an unpainted carcass on the beach. It is best to paint the turtle and bury it above the high tide line. If nesting occurs in the area, bury the carcass well off the nesting beach behind the dune line to prevent digging into any nests. Codes 1-4 are used for dead turtles only.

Code 2 turtles (buried on or off the beach) - include turtles disposed of at local landfill locations. Codes 6 & 7 are for live animals. If you check code 6 (alive, released), please describe when and where the turtle was released in the box at the bottom of the form. If you check code 7 (alive, taken to a rehab. facility), please write the name of the facility where the turtle was taken in the blank provided. If a turtle was found floating and the carcass (or live turtle) was not recovered, check code 8 (left floating). If none of the codes describes what you did with the turtle, please explain in the box at the bottom of the form.

**Sex:**

Since immature sea turtles cannot be sexed externally, you should most often check undetermined. Loggerhead and green turtles < 92 cm straight carapace length (SCL), Kemp's ridleys < 60 cm SCL, and hawksbills < 80 cm SCL are generally considered immature. Adult male turtles will have a tail that extends well beyond the posterior tip of the carapace. If you document a turtle with a long tail, please measure the length of the tail beyond the carapace and record the measurement in the blank provided. If you necropsy a turtle and determine the sex through visual exam of the gonads, please check the box provided.

**Tags:**

Check all four flippers of the turtle for flipper tags or evidence of lost tags (tear-out scars). If found, record all tag numbers, where each tag was located on the turtle (example: XXX111-left front flipper, XXX112-right front flipper) AND the return address inscribed on the tag; if tear-out scars, note location. Examine the carapace for living tags; if found, record the location in the space provided on the form. If you have a PIT tag scanner, scan the turtle and record the tag number and location of any tag found. Any Kemp's ridley carcasses encountered should have both front flippers salvaged (frozen) for wire tag scan – contact your state coordinator. ANY TURTLE THAT HAS ANY TAGS OR EVIDENCE OF LOST TAGS SHOULD BE SALVAGED FOR FURTHER STUDY – CONTACT YOUR STATE COORDINATOR.

**Carapace Measurements:**

Record all measurements taken in the appropriate blanks and be sure to circle the unit of measurement – centimeters (cm) or inches (in). Straight-line measurements are taken ONLY with calipers. If you do not have calipers, do not fill in the blanks for straight-line measurements. If you do have calipers and take straight-line measurements, please take curved measurements as well. Curved measurements are taken with a flexible measuring tape. The proper locations for obtaining standard carapace measurements are shown on the stranding form. If the measurements taken are estimates (due to carapace damage or decomposition), please indicate this on the form.

**Remarks:**

Please provide as much information as possible about the stranding. Note any wounds or abnormalities, tag locations, entanglement, etc (you can also draw on the diagrams). All information provided will be coded as part of the turtle's record. If the turtle is entangled, try to salvage the entangling material(s) and contact your state coordinator. PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE THIS SECTION BLANK – NOTE IF NO WOUNDS OR ABNORMALITIES WERE FOUND.